

*In The House
of Another*



Beatrice Mantle

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And then she crept back to the mirror

IN THE HOUSE OF ANOTHER

BY
BEATRICE MANTLE
Author of "GRET," etc.



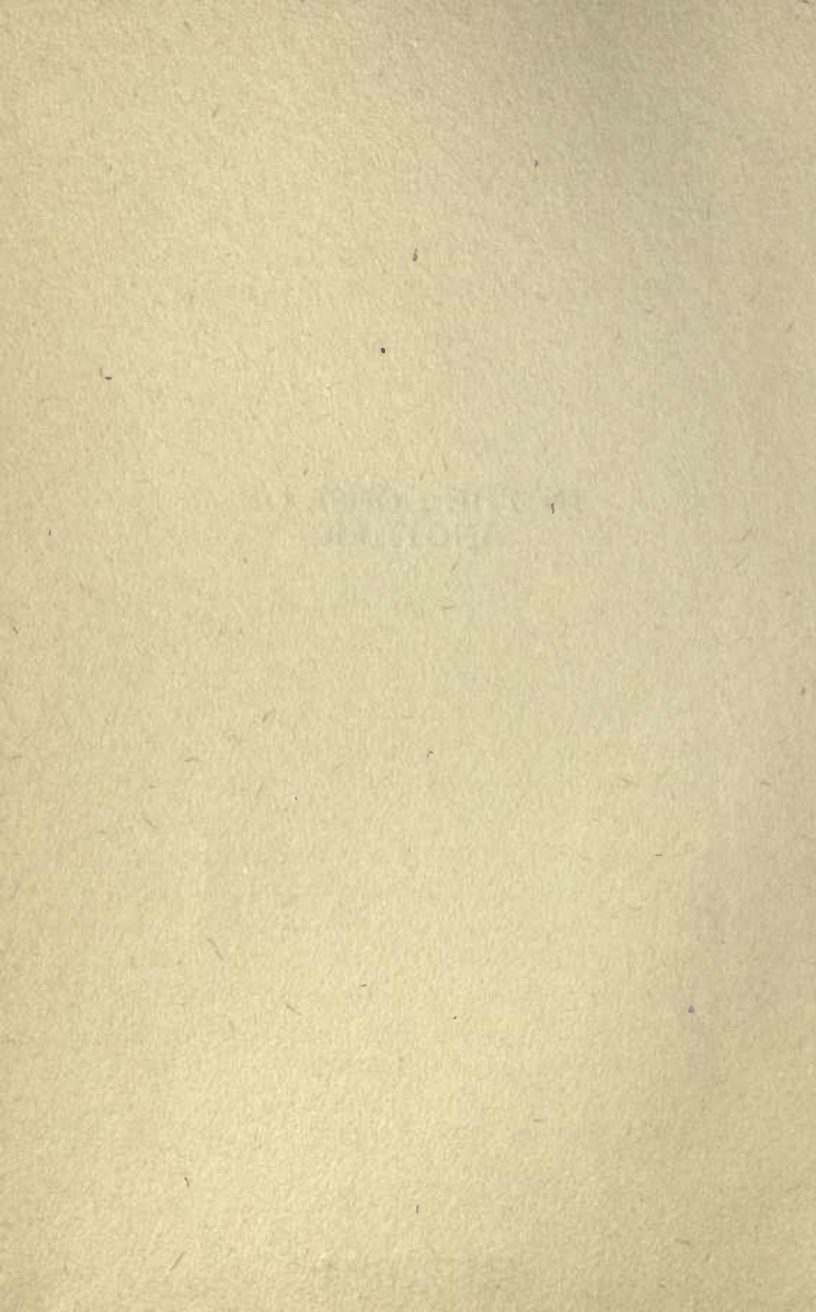
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ANOTHER

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CHAPTER I

UNA waked partially. She could hear voices and could dimly see faces bending over her. Faces suspended in mid-air, as it were.

"I really think it will be quite safe to let her sleep," said a man's voice. "There is absolutely no sign of —"

She fell back, down into that river of velvety soft darkness that bore her along past eerie cliffs and whispering caverns, through great living silences that caressed and soothed her soul. She did not think as she entered that wonderful darkness again. Still, she knew she was not asleep: only floating in the most profound peace she had ever known.

Again she came to a place where voices murmured. Some of the words came down to her in the river of darkness. She heard them impersonally as if the words floated idly with her and did not refer to her.

"Una," said a voice. And the name seemed to

echo softly from bank and cavern. "Yes — it is a queer name."

"Una." The soft darkness whispered it. "A queer name — a queer name. Una — a queer name."

"No, it was a collision," said another voice. Many murmurs, it might be of still more voices, floated about her. But only some of the words came to her: "Oh, no. . . . He's an oldish man. . . . Stenographer. . . . He had detained her at the office, and was just taking her home."

The murmuring went on. Una did not listen, and yet it seemed as if every part of her quiescent body could hear. She heard, but did not heed.

"She never had a very good time. And she must have wanted it. All girls do. Just had to work and support her mother."

Just had to work and support. . . . Just had to work. . . . The words tried to follow her, but the river was getting deeper and swifter; she went on into that profound but living darkness, where not even the sound of a voice could come.

After countless miles of voyaging, Una came to where there was light. It penetrated her eyelids. And though for a while she still lay with closed eyes, yet she knew the time had come for her to wake. Presently she opened her eyes.

She was wide awake, immensely refreshed and rested, like a child waking from a night of dream-

less sleep. There may have been a slight languor of body, for she realized with a content that stretched the full length of her the yielding softness of the bed; but her senses were fully alert, and she looked about the spacious room with pleasure and interest. It was quite plainly a woman's room, and the room of a dainty woman, too. Una followed every detail of its arrangement with approval—the cream wicker-paneled bed in which she lay, the triple-mirror dressing-table that stood well to the middle of the room, the polished floor and delicately tinted rugs, the ivory panels and exquisite vining morning-glories of the walls, and the softly flowered drapings edging the big windows. How more than satisfying life must be with such surroundings! she thought.

Before the window sat a nurse, reading. She had not noticed Una's reëntrance into the world of things, and Una made no effort to enlighten her. She lay idly for a while, enjoying to the full the delights of absolute repose. Then she considered the nurse again, and presently, studying this starched, professional presence, it was borne in on her that she had forgotten to investigate herself. She wondered whimsically whether she were broken somewhere, or supposed to be ill. She certainly felt well enough—not a single ache nor pain. Gently, beneath the covers, she tested each hand, each foot, and sensed the comfortable length of her spine. All was easy obedience. She turned her head from side

6 IN THE HOUSE OF ANOTHER

to side — and then froze into a very paralysis of bewilderment.

On the pillow beside her right cheek, and quite evidently depending from her own scalp, lay a shining braid of hair — warm, sunny hair, shot through with glints of red and gold. It was at least twice the length and thickness of Una's hair, and about as much like it as sunlight is like shade, for Una's hair had been nearly black. She stared at it fixedly for a moment. Then, yielding to a quick instinct of fear, closed her eyes and retreated suddenly into darkness again. Even before she had time to think a trembling horror seized her. Perhaps, after all, her brain had been injured, and hereafter illusions would be with her. And illusions were the beginning of insanity. She shivered and shut the lids still more tightly over her eyes. She tried to calm herself, to reason. Perhaps she had been dreaming. The room and the nurse — it must be all a dream. She opened her eyes gently and was bitterly disappointed. Every one of the unfamiliar objects was still there; she could not even delude herself into believing it was a dream. She backed into darkness and safety again. Perhaps she had been ill a long time, and that hair had grown out. Sometimes, perhaps, it did — She opened her eyes and spoke. The idea of the dream was still upon her, and she put so much unnecessary effort into the speech im-

pulse that the words fairly burst out. The nurse jumped as if she had been shot and hurried to the bedside. A glance at Una's face, however, seemed to reassure her. She smiled, a pleasant, professional smile.

"Well, you've wakened. Feeling almost yourself again?"

"Yes, thank you. How long have I been here?"

"Oh, just since last night. Don't you remember?"

"No-o. Why did you bring me here?"

From her expression the nurse evidently considered that a somewhat foolish question. "Well, you were unconscious, of course. But there seemed absolutely no injury done, no need to take you to a hospital. And so — they brought you home."

Home! Last night! Una closed her eyes again, while a wave of sick apprehension passed over her. What terrible muddle was it? And yet she could remember the accident — every detail of it.

"What — how —? Were the others hurt?" she asked, and her voice sounded sweeter and rounder than usual, even in spite of her fears.

"Well, not much, considering. The lady in the other car had her collar-bone fractured. And she may have internal injuries; they don't know yet. The — the gentleman with you" — Una could almost believe the nurse looked prim as she said this —

"had his wrist rather badly sprained. But no one was very seriously hurt, I guess. It was really a very lucky accident."

Una closed her eyes, and turned her head away. She was entirely lost, entirely at sea. She could not even think. There seemed to be no starting-place from which to begin to think.

As she lay, panting internally as it were, there came a knock at the door. The nurse went and opened it, and a man's deep voice spoke as the owner thereof evidently entered the room. "Well, nurse, how is she now?"

"Excellent," replied the nurse, as both approached the bedside. "She woke up a moment ago and spoke to me. She was quite normal. Just a little languid, perhaps, from the shock, but otherwise perfectly normal."

"That's good," said the man's voice. It was a very agreeable, well-bred voice. And—so much can one judge from a voice when intuitive attention is not divided by visual consideration—Una instinctively knew that the man uttering those tones was master of himself and the life he lived. Also, she thought she detected a faintly tired note, the echo of a spirit disappointed somewhere. "Well, you had better remain with her until she herself tells you what she wishes done."

Una felt that he stood and looked at her a moment longer; and she lay like a frightened fugitive

behind the wall of her tightly closed eyelids. Then he went, and she heard the nurse go back to her seat.

She lay for a while, trying desperately not to think. But thoughts came trooping, crowding, like frightened multitudes coming to view a tragedy. Presently, almost as frightened of the internal state as she was of the exterior, Una opened her eyes again. The nurse noticed this and came back to the bedside.

"Mr. Leland came in to see you a few minutes ago."

"Yes?" Una was almost sullenly unresponsive.

"Yes. You had fallen asleep again."

As this was stating an apparently obvious fact, Una made no reply. She felt hunted, wary, like a fugitive hiding in a strange house. And that, out of the chaos and turmoil of her feelings, was as yet the only impression definite enough to produce any resultant action. She was distrustful of the nurse, too, of the faint intimation of something withheld in her manner. She closed her eyes again.

CHAPTER II

UNA was glad when the nurse, after vainly trying to tempt her patient with proposed delicacies, went down to luncheon. She was glad to be rid, if only for half an hour, of what she felt to be a watchful presence. When the woman returned to the room, she kept her head steadily averted.

Toward the middle of the afternoon Una yielded to a desire that embodied both fear and fascination. She wanted to remain in bed. Tucked under the clothes, with her eyes shut, she felt safer from inspection and detection. Yet she was conscious of an ever-growing, more urgent impulse to rise and look in that triple mirror to see who she was. Or was it she? What would it show? Una slowly passed her hand from the strange luxuriant hair over her forehead, the bridge of the nose, and the mouth, down to the chin. Were these really her features? She shivered with nervous fear and the watchful nurse looked up inquiringly.

"I think I shall get up."

"And dress?" inquired the nurse. "Or just for the bedroom?"

"Just for the bedroom," replied Una. Sitting on the edge of the bed, she surveyed unaccustomed

feet with wonder, a queer satisfaction, and dismay. They were slender feet, beautifully kept — feet that no girl might object to owning. But Una looked at them with distrust and dislike, as the feet of another brought into close contact with herself. And then she noticed for the first time that she had new and strange rings on her hands: a slender wedding-ring — Una's eyes grew wide as she looked at it — and a half-hoop of diamonds; and on her right hand a pearl marquise — a large, wonderfully lovely pearl, surrounded with diamonds.

Meanwhile the nurse opened a door paneled with a full-length mirror, inspected the contents of the spacious closet for a minute, and selected a loose negligée of pretty flowered crêpe and lace.

"I wonder whether this will be warm enough," she deliberated as she came across the floor with the garment held critically up before her.

Una nodded. "Yes. I shall slip it over my nightgown."

The nurse helped her to put the negligée on, produced a pair of fur-topped slippers from somewhere, and Una stood up. She felt perfectly safe on her feet and walked unhesitatingly to the dressing-table. She sat down before it, inhaled sharply, and raised her eyes.

Before her she saw other eyes, wide, solemn, dilated — eyes that stared into hers and besought. She saw a finely sculptured face, with curved, pas-

sionate lips, tightly closed now, as though forcibly to keep something back. Quietly, almost rigidly, Una looked for a moment or so; then, leaning her arms on the table, she suddenly covered her face with her hands and blotted out the vision.

"Are n't you feeling well, Mrs. Leland?" came the anxious voice of the nurse behind her. With a quick stab of fear and caution, Una was recalled to herself, and saved from the attack of grief and terror about to overwhelm her.

"Oh, yes; I'm all right, thank you." Una knew that her voice, coming in answer to so civil and harmless a question, sounded curt and strange. She forced herself to rise and leave the fascinating mirror without another glance. To stay before it was to betray at least the fact of something unusual.

She walked to a deep, cretonne-upholstered chair and sat down. In all that she did just now Una hardly seemed dependent upon either her will or her reason. She was impelled, hypnotized into right action by the pursuing, sickening fear of being adjudged insane.

From the chair she looked through the window upon an unusually beautiful suburban garden. With a certain faint sense of rest Una's troubled eyes followed the green lawn spaces into shady corners, where, between piled, mossy stones ferns were growing. Contemplating these beauty spots, Una forgot her sorrows for a moment. But they re-

turned, almost swooping on her, as it were; and with an unconscious gesture of weariness she turned her eyes from the garden to meet those of the nurse intently watching her face. Out of the depths of an unreasoning and unreasoned resentment, Una returned the woman's gaze with a cool stare. With unbroken professional calm the nurse's eyes traveled from Una's face to the bed from which she had lately risen, and getting up in a matter-of-fact way, she went over to throw it wide open.

Una turned over in her mind the best way of getting rid of the nurse. Though in the utmost extreme of nervousness and bewilderment, in a chaos of fears and apprehensions, Una still could plan for her own safety. Paradoxically speaking, the only period of rest from strain that her brain apparently knew was when scheming to find an explanation or a way out. So now she considered the nurse problem. She did not know how the woman would be paid, nor even who would pay her. She held her breath when she thought of the man who had come to see her. The nurse called him Mr. Leland, and her Mrs. Leland. Again from Una's heart welled the silent cry that in the last few hours had risen so often: "Oh, what shall I do? Where shall I turn? Where can I go?"

The nurse came back to the window-seat, remarking upon the pleasant outlook provided by the garden beneath. Una answered perfunctorily and be-

gan the diplomatic task of trying to rid herself of her unwelcome attendant in a pleasant and natural manner.

"There won't be the least necessity for your remaining with me to-night, nurse. I'm perfectly myself. And I suppose you were up the whole of last night."

"Oh, yes. It was necessary to watch you," replied the nurse. "But I thought perhaps I had better find a way of getting some sleep in here for another night, until we are quite sure —"

"I am already quite sure that I am perfectly right," said Una quickly. "And who should know better than I?" Usually controlled and patient, she felt her temper slipping unaccountably. "Go and find a real bed, and get a good night's sleep."

This was obviously to the nurse's liking. "There is a spare bedroom across the hall —"

"Yes. Is the bed made up?" inquired Una with diplomatic coolness.

"It appears to be. And if not —"

"Yes." Again with a deceptive resource and facility that she felt were previously foreign to her, Una passed her hand over her eyes as if too preoccupied and weary for detail. "Arrange things to suit yourself and be comfortable. When you go down to breakfast in the morning —"

"Oh, I shall come in to see you before doing that."

"Very well. And then —"

"Well, then, if you no longer need me, I can make my report to Mr. Leland," hazarded the nurse.

"Yes. That will be all right." Una tried to curb into politeness her determination to be rid of this watchful, professional presence. "Now go and take a walk. Some fresh air will improve your night's sleep."

The nurse smiled and rose.

When she had been safely away a few minutes Una, fascinated by the mirror and yet afraid to face it, explored the room she was in. She peered into the wardrobe closet, filled with delicate and apparently rich clothing, and opened drawers full of woman's belongings, glancing in furtively as if expecting the rightful owner to appear and resent the impertinence. She opened the door into a tasteful, square hallway, glanced down the staircase, and noiselessly withdrew in a panic. She tried another door and found herself in a handsomely appointed bath-room. Facing her, another door led out of this room. This one, too, after listening nervously and intently for a few seconds, Una opened. She looked into another bedroom, more plainly and massively fitted than the one she was in, and lacking the feminine quality. It was, even to her uninitiated gaze, a man's room. Moreover, her wandering eyes discovered on the solid-looking bureau a case of military brushes and a man's collar. With a rapidly

beating heart Una returned softly to her room and locked the door connecting it with the bath-room.

And then she crept back to the mirror. She gazed and gazed at the sweet face that rose to meet her; only when she began to feel that it was hypnotizing her, that she was losing hold of herself and all that she knew, could she force herself to rise and go out of the reach of that magic reflection.

Before Una could finally lock her door on all the world and face the night she longed for and yet dreaded, she had to endure a visit from the doctor and the nurse. The doctor wisely opined that she was still somewhat excitable and feverish as a result of the shock, but that a few days' quiet would doubtless bring everything back to normal. In the meantime, if she felt the least discomfort mentally or physically she was to summon him, and in any case he would drop in again in the course of a day or so.

She allowed the nurse to put her to bed. She could think as well there as anywhere — if she could think at all.

When the last enemy, for so they all seemed, had departed, she was left not in peace but at least alone.

CHAPTER III

IT would not have been strange if this first night under the new and amazing condition of her being had really driven Una into that state of insanity she so much dreaded. No victim of delirium ever faced a night of more terrifying unreality, insecurity, and loneliness. She could not think; for to think one must have some safe and accepted — or at least accepted — premise from which to start. She had none. Nothing was left upon which to stand and take a perspective. Nothing was left of the life she thought she had known and she could form no concept of a new one, for she had nothing upon which to base a concept. She was in the midst of a grotesque and horrifying nightmare, in which everything she looked upon suddenly overturned and was something else, and in which she herself was at once the nightmare and the subject thereof. She was absolutely alone. She dared go to none. Neither was there any place to which she could go. She must stay and face — what?

She did not know who she was, or what she was. If her brain had been injured, and the past was all gone, why did she remember anything? Why was part of life familiar and the rest strange? It was

always written of those who had sustained complete loss of memory that their minds were a blank. But she wondered. Were they always? Perhaps some kept silence from fear, as she was doing. And then again, perhaps some tried to tell of their changed mental states and thereby doomed themselves to the insane asylum. Grimly it floated through her mind that asylums held many a tragedy that stupid medical psychology failed even to suspect.

Once or twice Una gravely considered whether after all she might not be really insane. And yet she felt she would be most completely and sanely equipped if once she could decide—or could be shown—upon what personality to take a stand.

As the sounds, the noises of the street, died away, from very excess of thinking she suddenly ceased to think at all. She lapsed into a boundless sea of immensity, in which she seemed but a point of consciousness. But that point included all that had been or could be, and she felt confident and very much at peace.

So very vague did her hold on things, and even on herself, become, that, recalled from time to time by some slight movement or contact with the bed-clothing, she roused sufficiently to feel faint alarm. Finally she forced herself to rise and sit up in bed. And so she sat, staring into the partial darkness of the starry April night.

More to gather into some sort of focus the merging, shifting states of her consciousness, she deliberately set herself to recall the scene in the office before the accident. And although already it seemed but a scene that she could recall, with great ease and in perfect detail, still she sensed all the life that lay back of that scene.

So easy was it in spirit to enter that office that immediately she was back, sitting before her typewriter. It was a little past office hours and her employer had explained that he would have to detain her somewhat, but that to make up for lost time he would afterward run her home in the machine. Now she was waiting the completion of the transaction, the closing of which would need a little of her work. She had an idea that her mother would have supper ready, and would be chafing at the delay. But that could not be helped.

She was resting now, while she waited. She was very tired. Her hands were folded, and so great was the veritable hypnosis of repose into which she had fallen that the keys of the typewriter before her were a blurred mass. Life lay behind her like a dead weight. She did not think of it, but merely sensed the weight. It was a woman's life, not a girl's — never had been a girl's. Girls had parties and love-affairs; and bought things because they were pretty and not always because they were useful.

As relaxation became more complete the rebellious thoughts faded. So great was her abstraction that even her employer's entrance with papers for typewritten inserts failed fully to rouse her. It seemed to her that the brains in her skilful fingers did the work.

Then she went down and got into her employer's machine, which slid off with the silent speed of a greyhound. The street and office lights were twinkling out, but daylight still somewhat overpowered them. Una sat and with hardly awakened interest watched the different vehicles approach and speed by.

Suddenly one of the big machines swerved, sprang into the air and, like a beast of prey, leaped upon her.

So much she remembered. When she tried to go back of this, her brain reeled with sudden impotence or fatigue, and when she went forward in her thoughts and began to wonder about the body that had been hers so recently, about that other mystery-tortured soul that must now be hidden there, she sickened with the impossible problem of it all.

Toward the middle of the night, threatened again with a panic of fear and nervousness, she rose and turned on the lights. The radiators were still warm; she softly closed the windows and drew down the shades. The light, the sight of the solid, everyday objects comforted her somewhat. She put on the

negligée and seated herself in the chintz chair. She would endure the darkness no more.

As morning approached and the magnifying influences of the night upon the emotions were gradually withdrawn, the fever in her brain died down. Worn with her frantic endeavors to think, Una let go, and of her own volition tried to think no more. And then it seemed as if, strengthened by her passivity, her brain began to scheme of its own accord for the safety, mental and physical, of the entity she then presented. It was borne in upon her that it was useless, hopeless, to try to grasp in its entirety the puzzle confronting her. And as from the very first her most distinct feeling had been that of a fugitive, so now her strongest anxiety was to hide, and hide safely. She reflected and realized with growing relief that none could actually penetrate the wall of flesh behind which she hid. It would be like living behind a glass mask through which she could see and they could not. She might often imagine they could, but they really could not. If she never told any mortal being the secret of what had happened to her, none could ever guess. She must never forget that the only clue any one could have to the way things appeared to her was whatever clue she herself chose to afford.

To this shortened statement of the logic of the situation she clung as to the one plank of her salvation. Over and over again she formulated it in

so many actual words. "If I never tell, they can never know. And if they don't know what I think, they can't think me insane."

So soothing to the nerves is the effect of words or a statement quietly and persistently repeated, that presently Una began to feel almost comforted. She was like one who, having come breathlessly through a tunnel of darkness and horror, at length reaches light and sits down to breathe. Unconsciously she had fastened on a great secret of power — concentration. Over and over again she mentally reiterated this reassuring thought: "They can only know what I tell them."

Several times, though, during the morning paroxysms of fear threatened to attack her again, and those wild, chaotic thoughts tried to close in upon her.

Perhaps after all she was insane and these surroundings that seemed so real were but a delusion. Perhaps she would not be allowed to stay even where she now was, but would be hurled forth again into some other strange phase of existence. Perhaps —

Knowing instinctively that the firm grasp upon one clear and well-established fact was her only chance for mental safety, Una repeated her formula, clinging to it as a man in a torrent clings to a rock. This much seemed fairly certain, and it was all she needed to begin with: if she kept strict silence she

was safe. Surely there could never come a time when she could not at least be silent.

Toward seven o'clock Una heard water running in the bath-room, with much sound of splashing and ablutionary activity. Soon the sounds ceased; but they had wakened in Una a great desire to bathe and refresh herself. She listened intently at her door. All was quiet. She entered the now empty bath-room and listened at the door of the man's room opposite. No sound. Turning the little thumb-key that appeared on both sides of each door, she began her own bathing operations. The room was equipped with a shower, so she took first a very hot and then a cold one, emerging greatly refreshed and rested.

Back in her own room she busied herself coiling up the long waving hair. Engrossed in her task and delighted with the beauty of her hair, she actually forgot her troubles for the time being, until recalled to herself by a knock at the door she had forgotten to unlock. She admitted the nurse.

"I see everything is all right," said that pleasant professional after the first keen glance. "Do you find any stiffness developing anywhere?"

"Not at all. I am quite myself," responded Una, much encouraged by her own coolness. She felt exactly as if she were taking a part in some play and playing the rôle successfully. "You haven't had your breakfast yet, have you, nurse?"

"No. I have just left my room."

"Well, have a good meal before you go." She wondered whether there was any one to cook it for her. "Can you see to getting it yourself?"

"Certainly," she replied, with the pleasant smile that seemed part of the uniform. "Annie will put it on the table for me, I'm sure."

Una sat down before the mirror again with a brave show of resuming her hair-coiling operations. No doubt the nurse would think it odd she did not tell her to bring up her own breakfast and wait on her patient. But she was determined not to have that. She was not going to have those experienced, professional eyes watching her.

The nurse approached the back of her chair. "Let me do your hair for you, Mrs. Leland. It's so beautiful."

"No, thank you." Una laughed nervously. "I'm a freak about my head. It soothes me to brush it myself, but I don't like any one else to handle it."

The nurse retreated with a smile. "Then you are sure there is nothing more you would like me to do for you?"

"Nothing, indeed. Thank you for the care you have taken of me, nurse." She turned away with a nod of dismissal. "Your check—"

The nurse came all unwittingly to the rescue. "Mr. Leland is down already, I think," she volun-

teered. "I'll speak to him about it. Good-by."

Having dressed her hair to her satisfaction, Una went on a search for suitable morning attire. In the closet, ivory-paneled, light and airy as a room, she found everything that the heart of woman could desire — except plain house clothing. She opened a hat cupboard containing seven or eight costly hats, and in deep drawers underneath this she found lingerie and underwear calculated to fill any feminine eyes with delight. On the hanger rails, mingled with gowns, coats and negligées, were petticoats of many and various shades and fabrics.

Una turned over the contents of the drawers with a pleasure that was not unmixed. She could not shake off that furtive, dishonorable feeling as of one who pries secretly into the belongings of another. Hastily but more or less completely she investigated the contents of the big closet and came finally to the conclusion that the former owner, though dainty and most essentially feminine in all the details of her apparel, had been, to Una's way of thinking, a little given to over-elaboration and richness. From the wide choice at her disposal she was able to find underwear pretty much to her taste; but nowhere could she discover anything at all approaching her idea of a morning house dress. Finally Una took the plainest gown she could find, a smoke-gray cloth. In the smooth-rolling drawers of the dressing-table she found, among an astonishingly varied and much-

tossed-over collection of neckwear, a fichu collar of embroidered muslin. It made a pretty and demure finish to her toilette.

When she was ready to go down, Una stood a minute with her hand on the door-knob. Already the room she was in had become somewhat familiar, had begun to have a friendly aspect. It was all she knew. She was going down to she knew not whom or what. However, out of dire extremity a certain grim courage is always born. The very lack of choice which an extremity presents is in itself a strength, as all forces are marshaled to meet the one course possible. So, mentally repeating her resolution to maintain at all costs silence as to that almost unbelievable thing which had happened, Una began her descent of the staircase.

CHAPTER IV

HALF-WAY down, the stairs opened upon a square, continuing at a different angle. From the square, through leaded glass, Una looked down into what appeared to be a morning- or sun-room. It was long and rather narrow, mostly glass overgrown with vines, with a brown-stone fountain urn and basin at one end. At the farther end, his breakfast on a small table beside him, sat a man reading a newspaper. Una glanced at him, obtaining a fleeting impression of graceful outline and ease of attitude, and looked involuntarily down at the narrow gold band on her finger. Undoubtedly this man was her husband, whoever she was, and Una's eyes grew wide at the thought. She grasped the wall to steady herself. However, she had decided at dawn that it would be madness to attempt to forecast the probable outcome of anything that presented itself just now. She must strictly keep all her wits at home and focused on the happening of each hour. Hour! Each moment, almost.

She went down the remaining stairs and stepped into a large and exceedingly pleasant living-room. Almost all one side of it was taken up by wide win-

dows; at one end was a large red granite fireplace; near her were quaint sliding doors of leaded glass, through which a well-appointed dining-room could be seen. A few handsome rugs on the hardwood floor, a piano, a library table, and chairs of many and inviting shapes constituted about all the furnishings of the room. But the dark woodwork and the hangings were so harmoniously subdued that the room seemed a picture of deep-toned beauty.

Una felt exactly like a guest going to breakfast after a first night's sleep in a strange house. She had to fight the inclination to sit down and wait for some one to come and greet her. Instead, after giving herself a moment's grace, she walked resolutely toward the small archway leading from the farther end of the living-room into the morning-room and into the presence of the master of the house. He heard her coming and quietly put aside his paper. Evidently he was not the man who had been with her in the car, for both this man's wrists were uninjured.

Forgetting for the moment to be other than curious, Una saw how nearly from the sound of his voice last night, and the manner of his spoken words, her intuition had been able to outline the owner. She saw all that she had somehow expected to see, even felt that she had expected to meet the direct and exceedingly discerning glance bent on her.

He looked her over. The night had left faint

blue shadows beneath the wide, eager eyes; a fever spot of color was still on each cheek, and the vivid, full-engined body was languid after the night's struggle. All this increased the essentially feminine charm of her, but Una was entirely unconscious of any such effect. Instead she was rapidly revolving in her mind the obvious necessity of saying something. As the man before her was a total stranger, this was decidedly a puzzle. However, she decided that the usual morning greeting would be safe and non-committal. With an embarrassed smile and a still more embarrassed walk she approached the table.

"Good morning."

"Good morning, Elsie," he replied, drawing a chair forward for her. "Are you feeling quite yourself again?"

"Quite, thank you," she answered, seating herself.

He sat and looked at her, detecting a difference in her manner. Nothing else, of course, would have been possible. The very concentration which Una was bringing to bear on the situation was a force emanating from her, and contradicting all the man knew and expected of this woman who was — and was not — his wife. Having absolutely no clue to the real state of affairs, Leland sought for an explanation in some assurance which circumstances might have given her.

"And so," he went on then, "Nemesis did not overtake you this time."

He referred, Una did not doubt, to the accident of the night before. And also, quite apparently, to much more; but of that she could not even guess. "Would you call it an overtaking?" she parried in reply.

"I suppose not — literally." He pointed to the paper on the floor beside him. "I see Renshaw has been able to keep it out of the papers. That is rather easy for him, anyway. But where do you consider I stand in the matter?"

Una looked at him in silence. She could not possibly make any safe reply.

"I mean," he went on, "in respect to what I once told you about bringing my name into actual public disfavor. Do you remember?"

Una made answer what was for her the truth. "No, I don't remember what you particularly refer to."

"I think you do," Leland contradicted quietly. "I told you that the first time you made a public parade of my name I should banish at once the reluctance I feel at giving a woman the first actual turn into the downward path. Not to mince matters, that I should begin divorce proceedings. I suppose you'll say that my name has n't been paraded yet. It has n't — in print."

He paused, as if expecting her to make some re-

ply. But it was impossible for Una to speak. She was expected to take up the thread of a story she knew nothing of. His words, however, conveyed a great deal to her shamed, intent understanding. Some of the terror and helplessness of the night returned to her. What was going to become of her, after all?

"You have always ridiculed what you were pleased to call my unfounded suspicions," he went on after a moment. "But I was n't suspecting — I knew. Still, I let it go at that, as being less undignified on the whole. But what are we going to do now? We can't either of us pretend that we don't know — and know that the other knows."

It was a direct question and demanded an answer. Gathering as firm a grasp of the situation as she could, Una voiced what seemed to her the only possible course. "You must do whatever you think best," she said gently.

Again Leland looked at her with faint curiosity in his eyes. "Well, I like that better than the silly tears and denials that I have been treated to of late," he observed.

Until he spoke, Una, with all her perplexity and trouble, had never once thought of tears. But now that he mentioned them she was conscious of a sense of fullness about the eyes, as if they would flood at a moment's notice; and she was both surprised and disgusted. Tears had never been one of her weak-

nesses. However, she combated the suggestion in the best possible way. She dismissed it, and turned her whole attention to meeting the odds against her.

Leland leaned forward a little, resting his arm on the arm of the chair and his chin on his hand.

"I often wonder what it is you're banking on, Elsie. Well, of course I know it's one of two things. Perhaps both. But I can't account for your crediting either. Because usually you're no fool." A slight, reflective smile was on his lips, but in his eyes neither resentment nor sadness. He was too strong a man for either to last long. "But I suppose that as long as a woman of your kind can look into her mirror and see that her bodily charms are still undiminished, she cannot possibly conceive of any man's infatuation waning. Mind and character have nothing to do with the matter, seeing that the physical was all that was ever taken into account. I'll wager"—his smile deepened—"that you're as confident as you are that you're sitting there before me, that it's my still unbroken infatuation for you that makes me so wilfully blind to many things. Doubtless you think I'm breaking my heart in secret. And it's so romantic! Neither you nor your associates—who must think me either a great idiot or a spiritless cur—could understand that, though my love and respect for you are dead, I still have a shade of respect left for the vows I

took to protect and cherish you. I know your nature; I know the man you are dealing with. I know that as soon as I withdraw my name and the protection of my home from you, your path will be one steady, even if slow, descent. I've seen it all before. But"—his tone was quieter, more deliberate—"don't go too far. Just as soon as I'm obliged to take official cognizance, I shall—in only one way. And there will be no withdrawing from that stand, once taken."

His cool, deliberate gaze still rested on her face, and Una returned the gaze, almost fascinated, unable, it seemed, to think, much less speak. Then Leland bent over and picked up the paper which he had cast loosely on the ground.

"I don't believe Annie knows you're down," he said. "Better ring."

After Leland had left the house, going presumably to his office or business, Una remained at the table, too confused, too dazed to ring. The maelstrom of her thoughts and emotions was so great that, as if by some centrifugal force born of it, she herself seemed in the center of the wild current, motionless, feelingless, thoughtless.

Presently Annie came in to remove the breakfast dishes. She proved to be a strong, competent-looking young woman of probably Swedish or Finnish extraction. She exclaimed with surprise on seeing Una, explained that she had been about to go up

to see if she would n't like her breakfast in bed, and promised her a dainty breakfast in a few minutes. She talked as if to a spoiled child, and Una's strained, unnaturally alert perceptions had no difficulty in discovering that Annie had managed the house pretty much to suit herself, petting and pampering her mistress as part of the process. Woman-like, a resolution shot across Una's troubled consciousness to the effect that, if her stay in the house should be of any duration, she would most certainly manage it herself.

In a few minutes Annie came back, bringing a breakfast of hot toast, eggs, fragrant coffee, thick cream, and marmalade; and to Una's surprise, in spite of her overwrought state, the sight of food was unmistakably pleasant. She ate all that the tray contained and was astounded at the amount she had consumed. Apparently, however, Annie did not share this surprise when she came to take the tray away.

Annie had evidently been in the confidence of her mistress. She talked a great deal, describing her feelings when her mistress was brought home unconscious and commented on the affability of the nurse.

"You could talk to her," she observed. "Some of them are so stuck up, you don't dare say a word to them."

Una did not share her enthusiasm on the subject.

She looked at the servant so thoughtfully that Annie decided her mistress must be still ill-tempered and moody. So she took up the tray and went.

The food seemed to act as a tonic to Una. After Annie had gone, she no longer tried to think of everything at once. Her thoughts cleared. One subject now occupied her attention, but that just now seemed the bitterest of all. It was Leland and his words. As she thought them over a sense of injustice amounting to a perfect rage possessed Una. It seemed impossible to contemplate seeing much of this man and not telling him — insisting and shouting it — that she was not, and never could be, what he evidently thought she was. The fact that she was plainly not going to be troubled with any displays of conjugal affection failed to comfort her. The relief that this fact might have afforded was swallowed up in shame and disgust at the character he invested her with — justly, no doubt, as far as he knew. If he had been a man she could dislike it would have been easier. But he was not. She liked him.

Seeing that like and dislike are not a matter of personal choice, but a demand made with mathematical precision by the worth of the accosting spirit and paid willy-nilly with like precision, it stands decided that no man or woman can be in the company of another for even the first half-hour and not really know beyond any doubt what it is to be

—like or dislike. Una did not attempt to argue away the fact that she liked Leland. She liked the level, unwavering glance; the ease and grace of movement that gave silent assurance of balanced nerves as well as balanced muscles; the calm strength of a character that could not be diverted from its course by woman's tears or men's sneers.

Moreover, and this seemed to give most of the sting to the situation, Una felt quite ridiculously sure that Leland would like her, too, did he really know her.

Here Una rose abruptly, as if bringing to a close an unpleasant conversation with herself. She realized very vividly that much thought along these lines would bring back the dread sense of unreality and insecurity, that her present salvation lay in contemplating and handling only strictly material things.

She went into the living-room and investigated it more closely. On each side of the fireplace wide bookcases were built into the wall. The volumes on the shelves announced, as if with staring placards, the diverse characters of the two occupants of the house. It was quite plain that the two had never shared the same literary tastes. Una divined that some fiat of Leland's had produced so clean a division. In the one case were engineering works, mathematical books, encyclopædias, dictionaries in

several languages, poets and philosophers. Among these latter were some volumes that Una felt she was glad to see. In the other case stood books on card games, on tennis, musical works, and dozens of novels by modern writers. On the library table at one end of the room were heaped indiscriminately fashion papers and music; on the piano stood a row of songs, some good and some merely popular. Una looked lovingly at the keys of the instrument. She had a feeling that she played a little, and loved music exceedingly. But she did not dare to touch the inviting ivory keys. She might be so much less of a musician than the other woman that they would inevitably betray her even to so great a novice in the art of piano-playing as Annie probably was. So she turned away and went into the dining-room. She admired the fine oak woodwork; the massive, simple sideboard built boldly out from the wall; the plain, heavy-beamed ceiling. She went up to the sideboard and examined each piece of silver and cut glass: pulled doors and drawers open and busied herself, like a bride in a newly furnished house, with an inspection of its contents. While she was still engaged in this fascinating occupation, she was startled by the distant ringing of a telephone bell.

She looked round almost helplessly. The telephone was not in the room with her, and she hurried back into the living-room. Again it rang.

38 IN THE HOUSE OF ANOTHER

Now she recognized the sound as coming from the morning-room. She reached the instrument and automatically placed the receiver to her ear before realizing her predicament.

CHAPTER V

"IS this Park two-five-seven?" inquired a woman's voice.

"Yes," said Una, wondering if it was.

"Is that you, Elsie?" asked the voice dubiously.

"Of course." Una's face was a study in concentrated attention. It was as if her wits would reach out across the space that hid her interlocutor from her.

There was a moment's silence, as if the speaker detected something strange in the voice — perhaps a lack of friendliness where there should have been full and instant recognition. And then, "It did n't sound a bit like you."

"I was breathless. I ran to the telephone," explained Una. She waited. She could not say any more, had nothing more to say.

Again a second's speculative silence. And then, in a slightly lowered, confidential tone, "Are you alone?"

"Yes," answered Una, endeavoring to pattern her tones likewise.

"Well, I'm so awfully glad you're up and about. I was coming over anyhow if you were not. They would n't let me yesterday: Said you'd be best left

alone," went on the voice. It was a charming voice, with a quaint little affected gasp in it. "How are you now? Feeling all right?"

"Oh, yes," replied Una. Hastily bethinking herself of the necessity of having something to cloak the inexplicable, her tones took on a languor to fit the statement: "Of course I feel considerably shaken up."

"Of course, you poor dear," agreed the invisible one instantly. "But, oh, is n't it a blessing you got off as well as you did? When Willett called me up I — Well, I just held my breath. Just think what it might have been."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Una — with much apparent fervor, but with a grim little smile. "Just think what it was!"

"Willett did n't say exactly where you had been going," went on the voice, "but he said you had changed your mind, and that you had turned round and were headed for home. That's such a blessing. Supposing, you know — it had been out in the country —"

"No, I don't want to suppose," said Una.

"No. But as it was —" the voice appeared to contemplate matters again for a moment. And then: "Did Alan — How did you explain?"

"I did n't," replied Una, truthfully enough.

"Oh!" A moment's thought. "Well, did he know, then?"

"Oh, yes."

"Goodness!" breathed the voice. "Did you — oh, good Lord! — get an awful scolding?"

"No-o: not a scolding."

"Humph!" the voice took on a dry quality. Probably, Una reflected, the voice was acquainted more or less with Leland. "Not much, but strictly to the point, I suppose."

"Yes," agreed Una, with a little involuntary sigh.

"Oh, well, don't mind," comforted the voice. "What do you care — the old crank!"

"Well, of course —" said Una, deprecatingly. Her sympathies were all on Leland's side. She hated to hear him spoken of slightly.

"Oh, yes, of course it's awkward," agreed the voice, judicially; "but then it was still daytime. Whatever he may think, I don't see that he can make so very much capital —" The sentence was left trailing in the air, which Una decided was a very artistic ending for just that kind of sentence.

"He won't try to use it," she said.

"Not this time, I suppose," rejoined the voice, with a little laugh.

"No."

"But you feel you have to be very careful — on probation, as it were," guessed the voice with a sort of dry understanding.

Una divined that her predecessor — which was

the name she had for all that had gone before — had made so much of a confidante of this girl, or woman, that she was intimately acquainted with all possibilities, both of personalities and circumstances.

“Yes, something like that,” she agreed quietly.

“Bother!” complained the voice petulantly. “That makes things so awkward. And that reminds me. Willett’s just crazy to see or hear from you. He called me up just a little while ago. I can’t remember half the things he told me to tell you. How can he see you?”

“I don’t know,” replied Una, easily enough.

“Well, you’d better come on over. And then he can let his man drive him out. You know he can’t drive the car himself on account of his wrist. He —”

“Oh, no — I don’t believe I’d better,” demurred Una. “I — I don’t feel so sure of myself yet.”

“You’ve had a good scaring, have n’t you?” said the voice reflectively after a moment.

“No. No; but I don’t want to come out to-day,” said Una. Recognizing the necessity of being explanatory and friendly, she added: “Honestly, I don’t feel myself yet. I’m not hurt or anything like that — but — oh, I’m just not myself. If I come I’m liable to cry, or laugh in the wrong place — or do something silly.”

There was a moment’s silence before the voice spoke again. “Well, you poor kidlets, I expect you

have gone through a lot." Whether the soft tones were full of sympathy or disbelief Una could not tell. "But you'll get over it in a day or so, and laugh to think how scared you were. What shall I tell Willett?"

"Oh"—Una was inclined to be impatient at this insistent mention of a man she knew nothing of—"oh—tell him anything."

"Well!" Una heard a distinct gasp. "No thank you. I want to live a little longer."

Una laughed—a bubbling laugh of real mirth. The amazement at the other end of the telephone was so apparent and so funny. "Oh, well," she amended then. "You know I did n't exactly mean that. Oh, you know what to tell him," she coaxed.

"I don't. I won't even try to think."

Una tried to for herself. She hated to send any kind of message to the man. She felt it was added disloyalty, though she could not have told why nor how she reasoned it. At the same time she was so utterly in the dark as to this other man—his identity, how far involved with him she was—and as to the extent of his hold on her, that obviously her only safety lay in making no decisive move whatever.

"Tell him," she said, "that I'm sorry about his wrist. And tell him that I feel foolish and shaken up, and don't want to come out yet. That's all. That will be enough. Men hate hysterical women."

The voice laughed. "Well, maybe. But I don't believe he hates you in any mood. You know, I had no idea how great a —" She paused. "I don't think you realize what a —" She seemed to have an odd, expressive way of leaving sentences suspended at advisable points.

Una sniffed in audible and sincere disgust. Already she outlined some conceited society fop. Rich, no doubt, but — bah! This disgust was not intended to travel over the wire, and did not in its entirety. But the listener sensed a very independent, troublesome mood.

"Well, I can tell you're not yourself one little bit," she avowed with conviction. "For goodness' sake, go and lie down again. Put in the whole of to-day in bed, and then call me up in the morning and tell me you're sorry."

"No, you call me," said Una quickly.

"Why?"

"Oh — just because."

"Because," mimicked the voice. "You have a reason, of course. And I shall make you tell me everything when I see you. You — why, I'd like to spank you!" She laughed. "Now go to bed."

"I will," agreed Una meekly.

"See you do. Bye-bye, old lady."

Una hung up with a sigh of relief, and laughed, really laughed. What a fairy tale! What an incredible farce! How long could it last?

After hanging up the telephone receiver, Una slowly and reflectively took down the telephone directory. Leland had spoken of one Renshaw, and the unknown woman had talked incessantly of a Willett. They were probably one and the same. She opened the directory at W, and found nothing nearer than Willard. Then she looked for Renshaw, and found what she expected: "Renshaw, Willett R., Fairview Drive," and beneath: "Office, 220 Renshaw Building."

Renshaw Building. Yes, that sounded as if he were a rich man, as she had surmised. She pondered a moment, considering the possibilities of the book as a source of additional information concerning the strangers who so unaccountably had come into her life.

She turned to the L columns, and looked for Leland. Yes, it was there. "Leland, Alan T., civil engineer, Lake View and Eastern Railroad Co., Blain Building." And just below, the same name with the residence address, "945 Schuyler Ave., June Park."

That was it. Una glanced out at the window with fresh approbation. June Park was evidently one of the nice, conservative suburbs of the town. She hung up the directory again. It was, of course, useless for her to try to look up her recent telephone visitor. That identity time alone would disclose. She frowned — a puzzled, worried frown, and rose

hurriedly. Puzzling and worrying would not help her.

Like a restless spirit, she wandered from room to room that morning. She looked each room and all its appointments over closely. The only room she did not go into was the kitchen. Not being able to guess whether the former Mrs. Leland had frequented the kitchen much, nor what she had done when she was in there, Una stayed out of it for the present.

About one o'clock she heard two taps on the dinner gong. Guessing that it was for luncheon, she went down with some misgivings, wondering whether or not Alan Leland came home for the midday meal. Evidently he did not, for the table was laid for one, and that one very plainly a woman.

Hot chocolate and whipped cream, crab Newberg on toast, cake, and fruit formed a dainty luncheon. Recollecting what she had eaten for breakfast, Una was surprised to find that the prospect of consuming another meal was not unpleasant. She ate the Newberg and toast, and drank the chocolate; but for some reason, possibly out of deference to the small appetite she felt she ought to have, she denied herself the fruit.

Luncheon over, Una went quietly upstairs. She was going to prepare to take the step which her mind, ceaselessly busy, like a captive in a laby-

rinth, had decided upon as her next in her search for herself. She was terrified at the idea of what it might lead to. But, like the desire to see herself in the mirror, it was irresistible and had to be obeyed. Besides, a sort of rule had formulated itself within her during the last twenty-four hours, a mandate imposed by she knew not what. She felt that, whatever confronted her in her new life from hour to hour, she must walk boldly up and face it. In hesitation she would be lost.

So now she was going down into the city — to where she felt she must have been many times before, to the center of it, whence most roads must surely diverge. She felt that the force of association could give her at least a clue to the mystery. Of course, as far as locality was concerned, she appeared to be at present just where she belonged; but if, on reaching the city, she had even the least inclination in one direction more than another, she was going to take it. It might take her to that mother she felt was still somewhere in the background waiting. Just now anything, even the worst, would be better than this horrible uncertainty.

Entering her room, she sought with much interest among her new wardrobe for a plain street suit. It was not to be found, as regards the plain part. The severely neat tailored suit had evidently found no place in the previous Mrs. Leland's scheme of dressing. Among the many coats, wraps, and cos-

tumes Una discovered three street suits; and of these the plainest was a lovely wistaria chiffon cloth, which she proceeded to put on.

Una surveyed with free and open admiration and pleasure the handsome reflection thrown upon her mirror. She did not feel for a moment as if she were admiring herself. All the love of beauty and of beautiful things that was so strong in her welled up and was satisfied as she turned slowly from side to side.

As she stepped outside the heavy street door of the residence and was about to close it behind her, Una stopped and clutched it suddenly. It had just occurred to her that she was going out without one cent of money. What was the matter with her? She hurried back upstairs. This might mean a final setback to her plans. Though surely there must be some money belonging to her predecessor somewhere, if she could only find it. She remembered to have seen, while glancing into the drawers of her dressing-table, a beaded hand-bag. That might have some money in it.

She investigated that first of all, and was rewarded by finding within it a small-change purse containing a five-dollar bill, a fifty-cent piece, and a few pennies; also, in an inside pocket of the bag, a card-case with Mrs. Alan T. Leland's cards; and besides these things two small keys, whose use Una promised herself to investigate when she returned —

if she did return. Indeed, if she returned she was going to examine her room very thoroughly — the desk, drawers, even the pockets of the coats — to see what information of one kind or another they might contain.

Again Una made a start for the street. This time she looked the house over very carefully from the outside, noting its surroundings and memorizing the appearance of both corners of the block. Though at the back of her mind was really a lurking doubt that she would ever return to this particular scene at all, still, if she were not claimed elsewhere, she might need to return to this last known anchorage, and she must know how to find it.

CHAPTER VI

THREE blocks below her house, walking in what she took to be the direction of the city, Una came upon a car line. She did not know in which direction the car she wanted ran; but she made up her mind to board the next one. She could at least stay on to the end of the run, and then go back down-town with it. As it happened, the next car was going to the city; and so she was soon started on her adventure.

As she sat on the car, Una felt like a person who had suddenly found herself on another planet and was trying desperately not to attract attention to the fact that she was a stranger. She almost marveled that no one seemed particularly interested in her appearance. The ride into town was not a long one; but to Una it was surely the strangest ride she had ever taken in her life. She was traveling with Aladdin's lamp and any minute she might accidentally rub it. Only, for her the lamp would work inversely and kill the brief dream of splendor. She sighed involuntarily. Two things already she liked more than well — the man and the home.

She alighted at a point that must certainly be one of the most central spots of the city. One of the

main arteries ran through this point, and five apparently important streets debouched into it. Street cars came and went in all directions. She stood on one of the corners, near the doors of a department store.

After waiting a few minutes, watching the people come and go until her mind was calmer and more easily concentrated, she began to examine the cars to see if she were drawn to one more than to another. She looked at the buildings about her, but no faintest inclination to go in any particular direction could be detected or even imagined. And still she did not feel like a woman in an entirely strange city; she felt at home and comfortable.

Baffled, she turned and went into the department store near her. It was an immense concern, doubtless one of the largest in the city, and she must certainly have been in it before. But as she wandered through its aisles nothing opened up before her, neither was the veil rent that had fallen behind her. Suddenly she wearied and decided to go home — back to that place whence she had started. She would go back and wait. Just wait and see what she was shown — what seemed to come to her to do.

As Una rode back to her new home on the June Park car, she reflected. One thing, at all events, this effort — unrewarded and a failure though it seemed to be — had done for her. It had shown her that for the present she was Elsie Leland. To

think of herself as Una and try to answer to the name of Elsie would bring about confusion sooner or later. So she left Una behind in the city and turned her face determinedly toward the new phase of life she had to deal with.

So deeply, in spite of the almost hypnotic influence which material forms have upon it, does the human soul realize that circumstances are but a set of conditions encircling a certain state of perception, changing as time, which is change of perception, goes on, that before Elsie was half-way back to her new home she had accepted the startling state of affairs thrust upon her and was almost breathlessly diverted and interested.

Elsie got back to Schuyler Avenue without further surprises, save that an unknown lady smiled and bowed to her in the car. Elsie hastened to return the greeting and reflected that among her many difficulties would be that of meeting people whom she would be supposed to know and naturally could not.

On her way up Schuyler Avenue from the car it occurred to Elsie that possibly one of those two keys in her purse might be the latch-key to Number 945. She chose the larger of the two, and when she reached the door, tried it. It worked; and she felt a wave of decided satisfaction pass over her — a sense of reality, of taking possession of her new life.

Annie was caroling loudly in the kitchen as she entered, but dropped three or four keys in pitch as she heard the closing of the front door. Elsie went straight up to her room and changed her suit for a *crêpe de chine* gown of a deep, rich blue. When all was done she delighted in herself before the mirror for the space of four or five round-eyed, delicious moments.

She discovered by the ivory timepiece on her dressing-table that it was nearly five o'clock. She wondered at what time dinner was usually served and whether Annie did the entire cooking and serving. But in this, as in everything else, she must wait and see. If she were supposed to help in any way and did not, perhaps it would be set down to her indisposition.

She went downstairs and amused herself taking in the view from each window. Now that it seemed likely that she would be here for at least some time she was interested anew. A little later the telephone bell rang. Elsie answered it with that strained apprehension, that keen summoning of all her wits which each new happening called forth. Her heart gave a quick little beat as she recognized the voice of the man speaking.

"Is this you, Elsie?"

"Yes."

"I find I shall have to go up the line," went on the voice. Elsie decided as she listened that it must

be the railway line with which he was connected. "So I sha'n't be home for dinner."

"That's too bad," replied Elsie, with a mingled feeling of relief and resentment.

There came the sense of a moment's consideration at the other end of the line. Then. "Well, I wanted you to know. Good-by."

Elsie hung up the receiver and went into the kitchen. It was beautifully light and clean, modern and up-to-date. She glanced round in quick, covert admiration. On the table, dressed and ready for the oven, in a pan of the latest glass cooking-ware, was a duck. Annie turned inquiringly from the range as Elsie entered.

"Mr. Leland won't be home for dinner, Annie."

"Oh! You're going out, then?"

"No."

Annie seemed both surprised and disappointed. "You need not get up a full dinner for me. What have you got besides that?" nodding at the duck.

Annie meditated a moment. "Some veal cutlets. And then there's ice-cream and cake; and potatoes in the oven."

"That will do nicely. And you can put it on as soon as you like, Annie. I'm hungry."

Elsie felt as she turned away that Annie stood looking after her, faintly puzzled. It was embarrassing, but would have to be lived through in the case of each person coming into contact with her life.

Her physical appearance and movements would be the same — for a time at all events — as those of her vanished predecessor; the inflection of her voice would be the same, or nearly the same. But the manner of expressing her individuality could not possibly resemble that of the woman whose place she had usurped. There was one comforting thought, however, she must keep rigidly in mind: though people might marvel, they could never guess the clue to the change. Unless she were exposed, unless the real Elsie reappeared, they would soon get used to the change and cease to notice it.

After dinner Annie came to her again: "You going to the show to-night?"

"No." Elsie shook her head, divining what was behind the question. "Why? Do you want to go out, Annie?"

"Yes, I'd like to. But you'd be afraid, would n't you?" From her easy manner of speaking Annie evidently had always been on familiar terms with her mistress.

"Oh, no!" Elsie laughed and turned back to the fashion magazine whose pages she had been turning, noting the many points of similarity between the costumes depicted therein and those hanging in her wardrobe upstairs. "You may go out, Annie. Only don't be late. I want to go to bed early."

Annie departed with promptness. After Elsie had heard her somewhat heavy steps go down the

cement walk and away, she turned at once to do what she had already longed so many times to do. She sat down before the piano, touching softly and tentatively the mellow-sounding keys of the upright. She felt somehow as if the ends of her fingers craved to play and she allowed them to place themselves. After a few chords, she turned over the array of music on the piano and chose a popular, semi-classic song with a fairly simple accompaniment as being the nearest to her mark for a beginning.

She was not surprised at the ease with which her fingers found the required notes and chords. She had always been able to play and somehow she expected these new shapely fingers to obey her. But she had always envied those who could sing. Could she? she wondered with a great thrill of hope, and knowing the melody of the song before her, began softly to sing. As she listened to the first bar, her joy was unbounded. She sang in a full, round mezzo-soprano, which she felt was trained. As a matter of fact, the training was but partial and the voice was full of technical faults, but Elsie was no judge of this. She only felt the ease with which it rolled out of her mouth, and noted the volume, and was almost beside herself with joy. The beautiful home, the jewels in her case upstairs, the pretty clothes in her wardrobe — none of these had given her the warm glow of delight, almost ecstasy, that

this new-found possession did. She almost felt like speaking aloud and begging that, whatever else might fade, this one thing might be left her.

For about two hours she sat there, oblivious of time, trying one thing after another. But at last her voice grew husky and tired and with reluctance she rose. It was best not to overdo things at first.

She stood in the middle of the floor for a few minutes, undecided what to do — to be exact, undecided what to do to keep herself from thinking. At the back of her brain an idea, a course, was shaping itself, and as yet she only knew that she wanted to keep away from it. She would read. She went over to the bookcase — Alan's — and took from it Maeterlinck's "Wisdom and Destiny" and seated herself in a big leather sleepy-hollow chair.

She read for a while, frowned and fidgeted a little, and then read again. The page before her was a dry collection of words. Not that she did not understand the English words before her — their definition, that is. But that was all. They were a mere collection of words. The idea, the spirit of which they were but the symbol, she could not conjure up. Perhaps she was just tired and stupid. But even as she tried to think it she knew she was not. On the contrary, her mind was keyed up to the fullest possible pitch. She took up the book again and carefully read a sentence. Of course she understood it; and for a brief instant, like a lightning

exposure, the idea for which the words stood flashed across her understanding — and then was gone, leaving the words staring at her.

She closed the book and laid it on her knees. It was useless to struggle with a state of affairs she did not fully understand. Not fully: a glimmering of the truth came to her.

The other woman had not been dull — far from it; in a way she had been brilliant. Her intuitive faculty — that link between the mind and the understanding back of it — was large, and its use had been developed, though perhaps perverted. She could scheme with amazing facility and skill; and her grasp of affairs, her judgment of the probable outcome of a course of action and its effect on the actions of others, was far-reaching and accurate. The quality of brain that the present incumbent tried to use was not less, but different — and that merely from the manner of its use. The things that this woman wanted to love and think much upon, that other woman had not cared for. Each habit of the body is a habit of the mind, and each habit of the mind must become a habit of the body.

And so, for the present, Elsie gave up and put the book away. She was going to know and learn to love these books, but not to-night. She could not begin to-night. She laid her head back in the chair and gave up to that brain that nowadays seemed to be her master. The delight and interest of the

music had given her a short surcease; but as soon as that was ended her thoughts flew back to her problem.

She had told herself as she came home from the city that afternoon that she would take things as they were presented to her and await the outcome. But it seemed she could not. Here she was, back at her scheming and puzzling. And it almost seemed to her as if, while her attention was diverted elsewhere, her brain, that anxious and faithful schemer and protector, had been unceasingly busy. For, upon the return of her attention, she found a decision almost formed. Not, to be sure, clothed in much detail as yet, but still shaped or shaping.

She must find that other girl in the accident. Reduced to the simplest terms, the main factors of her problem seemed to have reduced themselves to this. If she was living in some other woman's body, who was living in hers? When she thought of it like this, that other girl rose up in her mind. She had tried to find a clue leading to that shadowy mother, and had been thrown back on herself. She must find the girl. That she could surely do, though not easily perhaps. The nurse who had told of her was gone, and Elsie felt she would not have cared to question her in any case. No doubt Alan knew who she was; but she hesitated about broaching the subject to him. Perhaps that Willett had told the Lady-of-the-Telephone. Anyway, she

would find out. Instinct for her own safety told her to leave well alone. But she could not. The clue to the puzzle might be worse than the puzzle itself; but still she had to find it if she could. Somehow, in a manner hardly reasoned out, she felt she would be wronging some other if she did not.

CHAPTER VII

ELSIE was a long time getting to sleep that night. Dread of the plans she herself had formed kept her awake. But so weary was she when at last she did fall asleep that she slept soundly — so soundly that she was amazed on waking the next morning to find it was full eight o'clock. She jumped out of bed, bathed, and dressed at once. On going downstairs she found that Alan had not returned the night before.

As she passed through the dining-room after breakfast, Elsie was greatly amused at the floral decorations of the dining-table. The silver-and-glass epergne of slender and lovely design was filled with flowers — heads mostly. In each of the branch-like receptacles a tight round posy was wedged. Elsie took the epergne into the butler's pantry between the dining-room and the kitchen, and here she discovered the scissors with which Annie had evidently but recently performed on the luckless flowers. Armed with these, she went out into the garden through the French window leading from the morning-room. The garden was beautiful and carefully tended — by some visiting gardener, Elsie presumed, for none was in sight. She walked round pleased and satisfied.

She had been in the garden but a few minutes and was still gathering flowers and foliage to her liking when Annie came in search of her.

"'Phone," she said, adding in a business-like way, "Mrs. McKeene."

Elsie hastened into the house, preceding Annie's substantial, gingham-clad figure across the sward. She thought rapidly as she went. It was doubtless the same woman who had talked to her yesterday; if so, she needed to know her given name.

"Yes?" she said, seating herself at the telephone.

"Is this you, Elsie?" demanded the voice — that of yesterday — a trifle dubiously.

"Yes." Elsie drawled it affectedly. "Is this you, Lily?"

"Lily!" indignantly. "No. It's me — Addie."

Elsie laughed. "Oh-h! I should never have guessed it," — which was truthful enough.

"Well, you'd better. Lily! What Lily, I'd like to know?"

"Oh, almost any kind." Elsie bubbled with real amusement. It had come to be something of a game — an intensely fascinating because dangerous one. And then she quickly curbed her mirth and told herself that she had better be careful and keep her wits about her. Still, her ruse had worked. Addie McKeene — Mrs. McKeene.

"Well," observed the voice after a second,

"you're evidently feeling very funny this morning. But anyway, I'm thankful you're better-tempered than you were yesterday. What are you going to do to-day?"

"Be good," parried Elsie.

"Too big an order," returned the voice dryly.

"But no joking, now — what are your plans?"

"I have n't made any."

"Well, come over and have lunch. And then we'll decide what we want to do this afternoon."

Elsie thought hastily. She did not see how she could accept the invitation in any case, seeing she did not know where it came from. "Can't be done," she declared laughingly then. "I'm doing penance."

This statement was received with a moment's silent consideration. And then, "I'm coming straight over. Look for me, Elsie." And the receiver was abruptly hung up.

Elsie still sat by the telephone stand. Seeing that inevitably she would have to do so soon, she was glad she was going to see this woman at once. She felt something like the player of a game, about to enter into a great test of skill. That really was what it was and somehow she felt very alert and able. But this was a crucial encounter. She must not forget that. It seemed almost incredible that she could succeed in passing herself off on this woman who had been an intimate friend of that other. And

yet, on the other hand, how could that woman look at her and suspect anything different!

She rose and went into the living-room to watch for the arrival of this new friend. As far as she allowed herself to speculate, she was not going to like her. To begin with, all and any friends of Addie McKeene's ways of thinking were going to be so many obstacles in the new path she had, perhaps, to make — obstacles, though, that could not be removed abruptly.

As she was thinking these things over and gazing absently out upon the road she saw a handsome little dark-blue electric glide silently up. In a second out jumped a slight and exceedingly elegant figure, which banged to the door behind it and ran lightly up the cement walk. Elsie opened the house door and the figure tripped in with a quick little swish of skirts. Elsie had a fleeting vision of a bright, dark face, and then an arm went round her shoulders and a soft cheek rubbed kitten-like against hers.

"Well, you dear, bad old girl! I's awful glad to see it all right again — even if it is a cross old thing."

She was released and Addie tossed a rich wrap of brocade and fur upon a near-by chair. Then she turned back to Elsie, who was standing gazing at her and realizing once for all that speculating on the unseen is worse than waste of time. Elsie was not

aware that she had actually outlined her ideas of this woman specifically, but she found she had. She had covertly expected to see a large, languid-eyed, possibly overdressed and much-made-up woman — a professional perverter of young married women, a mistress of intrigue and a manager of risqué affairs. Instead, here was this dainty, high-bred looking little thing about as likely to lead any one as a butterfly.

With an air of gay satisfaction, Mrs. McKeene placed herself in a chair, clasped her hands round her knees, and laughed out loud. But neither the action nor the laugh was the least bit vulgar. Addie was one of those fortunate persons born once in a while who can say and do almost anything without by any chance appearing vulgar.

“Elsie, sit down,” she exclaimed. “For goodness’ sake — what is this? A Mrs. Siddons act, or a study for the statue of Repentance?” Elsie laughed, and sat down. “That’s better. Now look pleasant while I give you the ‘once over.’”

It was a very frank inspection and Elsie bore it better than might have been, owing to the fact that she herself was busy returning it. She admired very much and could not help liking on sight the face before her. It was so palpably the index of a thoroughly amiable nature. The dark eyes were bright and fun-loving, the small mouth a veritable rosebud of good nature, the cheeks two smooth, dimpled peaches.

"Well," summed up Addie, after her mock solemn examination, "you do look a wee bit different, though I don't know whether it's a tiny shadow 'way down in your eyes or merely a chastened expression. Yes — the effect is still distinctly visible. You did get a good scolding, whatever you may say."

"No, that is n't Alan's way." Elsie shook her head with conviction. Already she knew that much. "But — Oh, I felt horribly cheap! That's all."

Addie nodded, watching her friend with bright eyes. "I suppose so. Well, I don't know how some men look at those things. Of course, Terry's so decent about it. He does just as he likes himself and never dreams of objecting to my doing the same, provided I don't make a fool of myself. Just look what a terribly dull time he'd have if he did n't, being away from home so much of the time! — and me, too," she added with a mirthful pucker of the lips.

"Yes." Elsie kept thoughtful eyes on the ground. She felt the need of very guarded speech — else previous concepts would be smashed at one meeting and both be left wide-eyed over the ruins. "Only, you see, when the man does n't happen to want to — to do as he likes —" She paused. Then looked up. Addie McKeene's face was mirthful.

"Lordy, lordy! — as if such a man was ever made!" Addie laughed softly and swayed to and fro in her mirth. "They *all* do as they like, when

they like. Only some like oftener than others. And some like openly and some prefer cover. And some like to do one thing and some another. And there you are."

Elsie listened with a smile, but offered no amendment to this sweeping classification. And Addie went on, merry, quizzical eyes on her friend's face:

"But I came over with the full intention of allowing you to moralize as much as ever you wanted to. I knew it would make you feel better. I never knew you to do it before. But then, one does n't get shaken up in automobiles every day, either. Bound to come out of the shuffle with a few derangements, I suppose. Besides, of course, it was a very narrow escape—" From Addie's unfinished tone Elsie did not take the escape to be from physical injury alone.

"So now,"—Addie took the clasping hands from her knees, and arranged herself neatly in the chair, with the comical air of a curly little judge about to take evidence—"we'll start with your statement that you're going to be good. How are you going to do it—whatever it may mean?"

Elsie opened her eyes. "Dear me!" she laughed. "This is worse than writing the Declaration of Independence on a dime, as some misguided person or other did. How does any one be good?"

"That depends on any one's idea of being good," responded Addie promptly. "What is yours?"

"Oh, I have n't got it formulated and ready for

publication yet," answered Elsie, keeping up the quizzical strain. In reality she had no intention of being led into a serious discussion, supposing Addie McKeene capable of it, which she doubted.

"Perhaps not. But you've thought it over and arranged a few foolish little ideas in a row," insisted Addie. "I can tell you what being good means for you just at present. It means doing just what Alan wants you to and substituting his ideas for yours."

"It does n't — is n't — at all," contradicted Elsie promptly. "Can't I have ideas of my own about being good?"

"Yes — and they're not Alan's," responded Addie cheerfully. And then the whole discussion was evidently so amusing that she could hardly keep that laughing little mouth of hers straight. "Are you going to take the veil?"

"I had n't thought of it, exactly."

"Or are you going to stay at home all day and sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam? Or like the dear good ladies of old, weave gorgeous tapestries for the sitting-room walls? Only, as far as I remember, those same ladies always kept an eye on the bend of the road in expectation of the appearance of a knight — in armor or otherwise."

"The prospect does not appeal to me with any great force," responded Elsie gravely.

"Oh! Well, your brand of goodness is evidently an entirely new one." And then with a little sigh

and an air of banishing all jest from the proceedings, "Now, dearest, tell your own Addie everything. What is it you have on your mind?"

"Well,"—Elsie accepted the invitation at face value—"you've heard of a coating of ice being formed sometimes over a certain warm place, have n't you? That's the kind I've been skating on lately, I fancy. And I feel I'd better stop while—"

"While the stopping's good," finished Addie, with a queer little grimace at her own slang. "Hm! Well, I know in art it's horrid taste to begin with details. But in real life details have a dreadful knack of getting in the way. How about Willett?"

"Oh—Willett." Elsie looked impatient. Already she disliked the mere name of the man—unprincipled fop that she knew he must be. And then because she knew so little of the extent of his affair with her, she concluded half-heartedly, "He will be the least of my troubles."

"Oh, will he?" said Addie, dryly. "You can't persuade me that you know so little of him as all that."

"You mean that heretofore he has always done the winding up of affairs himself?" ventured Elsie.

"No," reflectively. "No, I don't believe Willett's a bad-hearted man at all. He's too big. But—he won't see any sense in the whole thing. And neither do I. I've never known you to have such a violent spasm. In fact, I have never known you

to have any spasms at all. That is one thing I have always loved about you. Life with you was just one big, joyous bubble. And now —" She laughed again, as if at the mere sight of the metamorphosed Elsie. "Of course, though —" she checked herself then — "I don't know what kind of ultimatum —"

Elsie thought a moment. Quite evidently she had been in the habit of making a full confidante of this woman. She did not want to seem to do less now. "No ultimatum exactly," she said then, slowly. "He is going to let me hang myself, unless I get into the papers. Then he will — finish the hanging. That's all," she sighed as the position, outlined afresh by the words she had spoken, occurred to her again. But she had to adopt this character, whether or no. The more thoroughly she could enter into what it had been, the better she could begin to shape what it was to be — if she were left to do the shaping. "Only it made me think, Addie," she went on. "Really, sooner or later, women who do — do things as I do, end up in just about one way. Don't you think they do?"

"No, I don't," responded Addie shortly and promptly. "Idiots end up as idiots, and fools as fools, of course. But so they do in every connection. And if you take long chances you're likely to break your neck, whether it's in the stock-market, on the race-course, or — or in life. Moral: don't

take long chances. Women — and men, too — who bungle their affairs, of whatever sort, are the ones, of course, that you hear of. The others you don't hear of. That's all."

Elsie nodded and accepted this argument with a thoughtful little smile. The logic of it appeared irrefutable; and would have been but for one thing. It was based on an unsound premise. Elsie felt this — knew it. Only at that time she could not think it out. And she would not have expressed herself if she could.

"Of course," went on Addie, tapping the carpet with her toe, and with the quaint air of really trying to think the thing out with total impartiality, "if you've thought it all over and really want to —" She paused, and allowed that sentence to end itself with decorum. "It's amusing, though, when you think about it — so childish and inconsistent — men, I mean. They calmly appropriate a woman who has been accustomed to living in a certain way. They themselves, perhaps, have n't been accustomed to living that way, or don't want to — comes to the same thing. And they can't, or won't, let the woman go on living in the only way she knows how to live."

"Well, I suppose," said Elsie, gently, "they expect the woman to think that all over before she marries."

"Not at all!" disagreed Addie, with comically cheerful and good-natured cynicism. "They be-

come infatuated with a woman and don't rest till they get her. Then, when infatuation is over, they expect her to remodel herself entirely to suit present conditions, which generally means themselves. Now, look at you. Look at the life you had with your mother — one long, continual round of pleasure. And after you married, a complete reversal. Not supposed to need anything but home and hubby. And you tried to live up to the program, too. You kept it up much longer than I should ever have thought you could — much longer than was good for you, really; for you were only holding yourself in, whether you knew it or not. And besides, what on earth would you do with fifty dollars a month?"

Elsie laughed outright, Addie's expression was so comical.

"Of course you could manage to dress on it, I suppose, and pay car fare and so forth. But what sort of life would you have?" And Addie opened her eyes as if in contemplation of its hideous bareness. "No bridge, no opera boxes, no dansants, no matinée luncheons, no — oh, well, simply nothing! You'd have to join a thimble club, and have a nice circle of ladies call on you, and have mild little teas at one another's houses in turn. And you might have a five-hundred afternoon once in a while by way of a debauch." Addie laughed in real and unaffected amusement at the career she had conjured up.

Elsie laughed, too. But she made no verbal criti-

cism of this sketchy outline of her new life. A sense of something more weighty than usual about the woman before her entered into Addie McKeene's dancing but still sensitively attuned mind. The feeling was not analyzed, hardly recognized, but still intuitively acted upon.

"Of course, dear old girl, if you really feel —" Again Addie trusted to the spirit of the sentence to end it with greater taste than spoken words, which it did. "I don't want to be a troublesome buttinsky. Only," and she pulled a wry little mouth, "I feel this is just a spell — you know, from the shock, and the — the unpleasantness you have come through. And I do hate to have you do things while it lasts that perhaps you can't undo afterward. But you've always been so clever at arranging and engineering things, so I don't believe —"

The look and tone of real affection that accompanied these words warmed Elsie's heart to an extent that surprised her. She realized for the first time that she was in the way of being lonely. She smiled, a smile of genuine friendliness.

"I won't do anything rash," she promised.

"Then we're safe," with an assumption of relief. Addie jumped up. "And now tell Annie — Oh, but I forgot! Does your scheme of salvation include me among the damned?"

"No — it does n't," replied Elsie, shortly.

"Oh! Well, then, tell Annie you're not going to

be home for lunch. And hurry. Madame George is sending me out that white hat this afternoon, and if the wing is n't on at exactly the tilt I told her, it goes back. I don't want it to come while I'm away."

Annie was upstairs officiating with much dusting and shaking in her master's room; and Elsie, on her way to get a wrap, informed her of her contemplated absence.

"Mr. Leland'll be home for dinner, won't he?" inquired that personage by way of answer.

"I suppose so. I have n't heard anything yet," replied Elsie.

"Well, got to cook that duck, anyway," with an air of announcing the inevitable.

CHAPTER VIII

ELSIE took a wrap from her wardrobe and then went down and entered the electric. It was deeply and luxuriously lined in a soft French gray, and Elsie seated herself with covert delight.

Addie McKeene drove the car with swift, light precision that won Elsie's immediate admiration. As near as Elsie could judge, she drove about six blocks in all, and then turned the machine into a narrow cement driveway and sent it without any manœuvering into the garage at the back of the lawn.

Elsie's new home, while in good taste, even approaching the luxurious, presented in comparison with Mrs. McKeene's house an almost masculine solidity of appearance. Addie's home was a rampant reflection of herself. The living-room, though of good size, was more like a lady's boudoir than anything. Apparently, too, all her life the little lady had been the recipient of rich gifts—gifts whose taste, although always good, was immensely varied. Only in that way could the almost bazaar-like collection of rugs, cushions, pottery, and statuary be accounted for. At one end of the room, forming a big alcove, was the music-room; Elsie

glanced with much respect at the polished floor and the grand piano.

Shortly after the two women had settled themselves to argue the respective merits of a Paul Poiret and a Lucille model of gown, a maid came into the room, acknowledging Elsie's presence with a pleasant smile. There was about the same difference between this girl and Annie as there was between the two houses; and Elsie wondered in passing whether she herself had discovered and hired Annie. Of course Annie was a good worker. The state of the house testified to that; and Elsie had not as yet learned that she herself was supposed to do anything in connection with keeping it up. And then she was a good cook. Possibly Addie's maid was not such a treasure in all these ways, but she was certainly of a more pleasant personality. Sallow and dark, with dark expressive eyes, she appeared to idolize her mistress, and listened with deferential yet indulgent affection to her airily elaborated requests.

"Lottie, I want you to get us just the very darlingest lunch. And Lottie, we don't need a truly, sit-up-to-the-table lunch. Put it on our little table with all the wings, and wheel it up to us."

Lunch was well over. The hat had arrived and the angle of the wing had been found to be mathematically correct. Elsie, having resisted Addie's coaxing to go down-town with her, was about to go up to her room to chat while Addie dressed, when

the telephone bell rang. Addie went to it and rested her arms nonchalantly on the stand.

"Yes?" And then, "Yes. All right."

She rose and came back to Elsie, a half-comical expression on her face. She gave a little backward toss of her head, motioning Elsie to her late place at the instrument. "It's Willett. After you've done talking, come on upstairs." She ran lightly up the staircase and out of hearing.

Elsie went reluctantly enough to the waiting telephone. "Yes?"

"Well, sweetheart, how are you?"

Elsie had already made up her mind to dislike the owner, but she could not help admiring immediately the voice that traveled to her. It was so deep and resonant. She disliked, however, the easy affection displayed in the greeting; and her answer was sarcastic, though leisurely.

"Oh, I believe I can be said to be out of immediate danger."

There was a second's pause. And then a slight amused laugh. "I perceive that a certain little lady is not in a very good humor this afternoon. What is the matter, pet?"

The tone was very gentle, very tender, a whole caress in itself; Elsie was amazed to find that seemingly in spite of herself something within her stirred to meet it. She was instantly disgusted with herself.

"Nothing — nothing that can be expressed just now, at all events," with indifference.

"Oh, I see," thoughtfully. "Well, I was very careful about that matter, was n't I? I don't think I neglected any precautionary detail. As far as I can ascertain, except for the immediate bystanders, no one was any the wiser. But, of course — I suppose you had the deuce to pay at home."

"Well — something like that," not seeing any advantage in disturbing that impression.

"I suppose so," regretfully. "But there seemed nothing to do but take you home, did there? I was awfully anxious about you and could n't get anything out of Addie the next day, except that you were pretty well yourself again. I'm so sorry, darling. It was an unfortunate business altogether. But — well, we were both rather upset, distracted, were n't we? And you know, Elsie," he paused, and then spoke in an even lower, softer voice, "if you had let me have my way we should n't have been at that spot just when —" He paused again. Elsie was listening with all her understanding, and she was impatient when the break came in what promised to be valuable information.

"Just when what?" she demanded.

"Oh, just when the other fellow decided to cut a corner," finished Renshaw somewhat lamely.

Elsie was quick to detect the lameness. However, that might merely indicate that he was more to blame

for the accident than he had so far indicated. So she asked, "Whom do you blame for the accident?"

"Both. He cut corners, and I was speeding, and not paying the attention to my wheel that I should." This last was added with a half-laugh. Evidently there was some reason for his inattention that Elsie was supposed to understand. However, she did not; and she could not wait just now to pursue that particular vein of research. There was other and more important information that she wanted.

"Who were they in the other car?" she asked.

"An oldish man and a girl," with a short laugh.

"Well, but who?" insisted Elsie, wondering why the laugh.

There was a moment's silence. And then, in a casual tone, "Calthorpe and his secretary."

Elsie could not be quite sure. Listening with attention strained to catch any possible clue, every possible inflection, she knew she might easily imagine this thing or that. Still, it almost seemed to her that the tone was over casual.

"Were they much hurt?"

"Oh, no-o. Calthorpe was n't hurt at all. The — the girl was thrown against the wheel and her shoulder hurt — collar-bone fractured or something. Nothing serious, I believe. Why, sweetheart?"

"I could n't — or did n't — ask Alan any particulars, so I'm asking you," replied Elsie with some crispness.

"I see," apologetically. "Well, don't bother your little head about them—the other parties in the accident. They're all right and just as much to blame as we. And there's nothing particularly out of the way in my running you home at the end of an afternoon in the city."

That all depended. But Elsie did not challenge the statement. "What is the name of the girl—the secretary?" she asked.

"This is quite a cross-examination," observed Renshaw with a short laugh. "Has any one been talking to you?"

"Of course not," sharply, but rather surprised nevertheless. "How could any one, when I did n't even know who the people were until you told me? But I can't understand why you won't answer a straightforward question."

"Oh, certainly. But you're not a girl to bother with details as a rule," stiffly. "Her name is Hamby."

"Oh! And what is her given name?"

Renshaw laughed—a slightly sarcastic laugh. "I see plainly enough that you're running to earth some rumor or theory. Her name is Una."

It seemed to Elsie that her heart gave one great leap and then sank back. Now she knew that his reluctance to pursue the subject was real and not imaginary. But what could he possibly know or

suspect? What —? But she must not forget. She had to find that girl.

“Did — where is she?” she asked then, after a pause of a second or so. “Did they take her home, too?”

“No — to some hospital, I think. There’s a chance, of course of some internal injury. But don’t worry about it, dear.”

“Which hospital?”

“Now, Elsie,” — Renshaw’s voice was almost sharp — “it’s foolish for us to work in the dark. What do you want to know all this for? What are you driving at?”

Elsie caught herself up sharply, and the quick instinct for self-preservation flew uppermost warningly. On no account, whatever others might do or think, must she indicate by her words or actions that anything out of the ordinary was happening — or thought of.

“Why, I think it’s you that is so strange,” she said almost fretfully. “I can’t see that I’ve asked any but very ordinary questions. I just thought it would be nice if she were at a hospital to call and see her and perhaps take a few flowers. You see, I was in the same accident and got off so lightly.”

“Oh, I would n’t bother, if I were you,” promptly. “I doubt very much whether she’d like it. Probably think you were condescending. She — if you

want to do something sweet, call up the hospital and inquire. That would be all any one would expect of you. Everything possible is being done for her anyway."

"Oh, well, perhaps so." Elsie decided not to argue the matter. She would not even ask the name of the hospital. Now that she knew the name she could easily find out for herself by calling those institutions up one by one. So many lightning-like thoughts were darting hither and thither in her brain that when Renshaw spoke again she forgot to be as courteous as caution would have dictated.

"Are you coming to town this afternoon, Elsie?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Oh-h! Don't feel like it." The tone was airy and not in the least apologetic.

"Well, but — if I don't see you to-day, I can't for a week or two," went on the man. "Of course I can't take my part now on account of this wretched wrist, but I'm going down to the opening tournament just the same. I wish there were some way of getting you down to it. But I suppose there is n't —"

"No, of course not," decidedly. And then, suddenly recollecting that she had not even been decent enough to inquire about his injury, in fact had forgotten that he had sustained one, "How is your wrist?"

"Oh — the swelling has gone down somewhat. But it 'll be a month or two before I can use it much. A bad sprain is worse than a clean break, you know." And then, "Well, shall I see you to-day?"

Elsie laughed slightly to cover the harshness of her attitude. "No, I think not."

"Oh, well —" A moment's silence, in which Elsie divined this man was doing much thinking. She was upset, scolded, perhaps threatened — out of sorts altogether. A week or so to herself would perhaps be the best thing after all. Then, cheerfully, "Well, if you won't, you won't. I must wait till I get back. But I 'll think of you every day, sweetheart."

"Thank you."

Willett Renshaw laughed. "Such a sarcastic little girl! This is the very newest thing in the way of a mood, is n't it? Never mind. Wait till I see you — until I get within reach of you: I 'll settle all the moods. Good-by for a little while, Lily Girl."

"Good-by."

She hung up, and stood quietly by the instrument for a moment or so. Somehow her heart was beating heavily. Then she went up the shallow winding staircase and, guided by her ears, entered a delightful bedroom having an oriel window. Before a rosewood duchesse table Mrs. McKeene was critically smoothing off her face the last trace of powder.

"Well? Are you going down with me?" she inquired, without turning her head.

"No, dear," replied Elsie gently.

Then Addie did turn her head — quickly. She gazed at her friend with frankly curious eyes. "You certainly are in the funniest mood — for you. Well!" She turned back to the glass again. She was full of curiosity, dying to have Elsie make full confession of all that had transpired, that was now actuating her. But she was too well-bred to question even her closest chum past a certain mark. "I must just run round with you and drop you at your door, then."

She did this. And Elsie entered her quiet home with a sense of vast relief. Time to be alone and to think.

But when she sat down and tried to think she could not. A thousand issues, a thousand questions and possibilities and fears rushed at her and assailed her like a horde of furies. She got up quickly. She was going to find that girl, and she would go at once. That was the next and only thing to do. No good thinking about it.

She went to the telephone prepared to call up all the hospitals given in the classified section of the directory. However, the second hospital called — St. Stephen's — gave her what she wanted. "Miss Hamby? Just a minute. Yes, Room two-thirty-six."

Elsie hung the receiver up quietly and then went straight up to dress. No use hesitating. No use fearing. This thing had to be done.

CHAPTER IX

HAVING ridden down-town, Elsie ascertained from a crossing-policeman the proper car to take for St. Stephen's Hospital, also the way to the nearest florist's. Here, at the cost of the better part of what appeared to be her only capital — the five-dollar bill — she armed herself with a cluster of exquisite rosebuds. Then she set out for the hospital.

If her heart sank as she walked in a businesslike way up the steps of the institution, she did not pause to realize it. With a sort of grim humor she felt that she was like a person bound for the dentist's chair, who dares not pause lest courage ooze entirely away. She did not stop at the office, but took the elevator straight for the second floor, where doubtless Room 236 would be. Stepping out of the elevator, she went up to a nurse who was sorting linen out of a closet and asked for the direction of 236. The nurse indicated an open door at the end of the corridor.

Elsie walked up and stood in the doorway. The room was a large one, containing three beds, all occupied by women, with a visitor by each bed. A nurse — a probationer, evidently, by her blue striped

gown — observing Elsie's hesitation, came toward her with a pleasant, inquiring smile. Elsie spoke almost under her breath: "Miss Hamby?"

"Yes." The nurse turned toward the bed nearest the window. By it sat an elderly woman, of plain yet stylish appearance. It flashed across Elsie's alert mind that this must be the mother and she looked at her with startled, anxious eyes. She could not tell why, but she was conscious of a sense of vast relief, as she scanned the thin, somewhat querulous face, to find that she felt not the slightest thrill of awakening memory, not the faintest quiver of emotion or interest. This mother, so strangely lost to her, stirred no longing in her heart. Mercifully, memory had lost its hold upon what the heart could not recover. Then Elsie's gaze passed to the bed. She had schooled herself to meet the shock of this moment but she could not suppress an indrawn breath of distress as she looked down at her own face upon the pillow.

The girl in the bed lay with her eyes closed, her dark, almost black hair drawn back smoothly from the pale, clear skin above the level brows. Elsie thought of that other moment when this face should have looked back at her from Mrs. Leland's mirror instead of the unknown features which had greeted her. The woman before her had doubtless known a similar agonizing moment. Now they were face to face.

At the same moment Mrs. Hamby spoke to her daughter.

"Una!"

Una Hamby opened her eyes. They met the appealing gaze of the visitor. Elsie knew she was not imagining the instant electrical stiffening of the girl's whole body, the flame of resentment that shot into the black-lashed gray eyes. She did not attempt to smile, but her lips set in a hard line as she lay and looked up at her caller. Almost fascinated by the resentful stare, Elsie was still conscious of the mother's open-eyed astonishment. After a moment Elsie made an effort to break the spell. She smiled down on the still unsmiling girl.

"I thought I'd like to come and see how you were getting along." Then suddenly recollecting that she had not let herself be announced, and uttering the name with difficulty, "I'm Mrs. Leland"

"Oh, yes, I know who you are," said Una Hamby, with a slight but almost insolent uplifting of the brows.

"I—I—" Elsie felt she was almost losing grasp of the situation. "Are you much hurt?"

"No."

The girl lay and looked her over line by line, as if satisfying a long-felt curiosity. Her lips lay in a faintly satirical, contemplative smile, and Elsie felt she was hating each line as she looked at it.

"I am so sorry you were hurt at all," went on Elsie. A sort of resentment, a sense of being put on her mettle, was coming to her rescue. She was only human and she would not allow herself to be nonplussed by such absolute rudeness. Whatever had happened, she was not to blame; no reasonable person could possibly think she was. She was conscious of that much in spite of her embarrassment. "I got off so lightly myself —" she finished, laughing slightly.

Una Hamby smiled too, but it was not a pleasant smile. "Yes, you always have gotten off lightly, have n't you?"

"Why, I don't know." This was true enough. But Una's query plainly contained some unpleasant thrust, and in order to ignore it, Elsie took the rosebuds out of the hollow of her arm and looked about for a place to lay them. The nurse was attracted by the movement and came up to her. Elsie placed the flowers in her hands.

"Oh, are n't they exquisite!" exclaimed the girl in sincere admiration. "Shall I put them in water for you, Miss Hamby?"

"If you like. I suppose the others will enjoy them."

With the intuition of her kind the nurse glanced swiftly from patient to visitor and, perceiving something entirely out of her province, moved quickly

away in search of a vase. But before she went she drew up a chair for the visitor, however unwelcome she might be.

Elsie seated herself, not because she felt she was welcome to do so, but because for the moment she felt positively weak. Her knees trembled and her face burned painfully. Still she was not going to admit defeat. She looked at the puzzled woman sitting near her at the bedside.

"And this is Mrs. Hamby?"

Una did not trouble to reply; and though feeling obliged to follow more or less her daughter's uncivil lead, Mrs. Hamby was nevertheless constrained to reply to what appeared to be a perfectly ordinary and civil question: "Yes."

Silence fell again. And it became apparent to Elsie that there was simply nothing left to do but to take as graceful a departure as possible. She could not — dared not — show her hand in the face of such determined animosity. Such senseless animosity, surely! She looked deprecatingly, almost pleadingly, at the hard, resentful face of the girl.

"Well, I see we're not going to be able to — to talk —" she said lamely. "I think it's a pity. I — I'm sorry you feel this way toward me. I thought perhaps we could —" she stopped. She must not be too rash.

Una's gray eyes narrowed. "I'm not going to

try to be civil when I don't feel it," she said. "Why should I? And so I may as well tell you that I don't see what you came for. You must know very well there is nothing I'd talk to you about."

"Well, whom would you talk to about it, then?" demanded Elsie almost in desperation, and forgetting all caution for the moment.

"That's entirely my business," flashed the girl.

"Oh, well." Elsie rose. She was angry, trembling, sick at heart, and suddenly anxious to get away. "Remember I did my best. I hope your shoulder will soon be healed. Good-by."

"Good-by."

The farewell sounded much more like an order to be gone and the mother supplemented it with a faint mumble. Then Elsie walked swiftly away, receiving, however, a specially pleasant "good afternoon" at the door from the nurse.

But she had hardly left the room when she turned back resolutely and stood again at the door.

"Mrs. Hamby," she called, "may I speak with you just a moment?"

Mrs. Hamby looked inquiringly at her daughter, but Una gave no restraining sign. Mrs. Hamby rose and passed into the hall.

"Mrs. Hamby," Elsie began swiftly, "is your daughter quite herself?"

"I'm sure she is," answered the elder woman,

with hostility in her tone; "I don't know why she should be unfriendly to you, Mrs. Leland, if that's what you mean."

"Yes," Elsie said, "I did not expect it and I wondered if perhaps the accident had seemed to have some queer effects in any way." As Una's mother shook her head Elsie pursued the advantage of the moment. "I wondered if she recognized you, for instance, and remembered everything perfectly."

"Oh, yes indeed," answered Mrs. Hamby, defensively. "Her mind's perfectly normal. I guess she remembers too much, maybe. She must have good reasons for her actions and it's none of my business, anyway."

Mrs. Hamby's voice was growing loud and Elsie spoke quickly.

"I am very glad that the accident was no more serious and I sincerely hope that her recovery will be rapid. Thank you very much."

She got home without knowing at all how she did it; went straight up to her room, threw off her coat and hat, and sat — almost collapsed — in the chintz chair. She laid her head back and closed her eyes and tried desperately to relax, to calm herself. But her mind was a perfect maelstrom — nothing less. Anger, fear, hopeless, puzzling dread of she knew not what — she was milled round hither and thither, until presently it seemed to Elsie that each thought as it darted through her brain was a fiery pain.

Suddenly she sat up. It was after five o'clock. She was not dressed and Alan would be home. He must not see her in this distraught condition. She must, *must*, learn to control her mind. When a subject threatened to overwhelm her she must learn to put it away at least for the time being. She must, or else she would have no mind left to control.

So, as she dressed for dinner, and the girl in the hospital bed rose up before her, she would resolutely down the image and put it away. Once, as she dressed her hair, and criticized with fresh delight the soft waves that fell over forehead and ears, noting the rich gleams thrown from its polished beauty, she really did for the time being forget her trouble. She had been repulsed by the rightful owner of this beauty, to whom she had gone in honorable distress as having innocently usurped another's place. Now the memory of that repulse quieted her conscience. Moreover, another comfort came to her, unguessed. She put on the blue crêpe de chine, because above the wonderful, deep color of it her skin seemed to pulse with delicate tints. She was dressing for Alan Leland — and did not know it. Not even when, on going downstairs and perceiving that Annie was evidently preparing to serve dinner before long, she went to the window to watch for his arrival.

He came, driving a substantial, well-kept looking car, which he turned with the unhesitating ease of long practice into the garage runway. In a few

minutes he came into the house through the French window and crossed the morning-room. Because it seemed ridiculous to do anything else, Elsie smiled and said, "Good evening."

He returned the salutation in an equally pleasant way, his eyes, quiet and unmoved but keenly appraising, traveling over her in one instant glance. Then he went on upstairs, leaving Elsie tense with some hidden, inward stress that she could not define.

She was very nervous as she sat down at dinner with this man who was everything and nothing to her. He carvied easily and waited on her pleasantly and naturally; told her of several of the day's happenings in the city. In his manner there was neither anger nor resentment, nor the least appearance of effort to be pleasant. Only the most complete indifference, broken and slightly veiled by the necessary courtesies of the occasion.

After dinner he smoked a cigar, standing at the open French window; then got a book, pencil, and note-book and sat down, apparently to study.

Elsie sat down, too, with a book on her knee, alternating between states of defiance and dread. Then she would watch Alan and speculate. As she did this—perhaps because of this—her resentment slowly died away. She wondered whether that girl in the hospital loved this man whom now she could not even approach. No doubt she still did. She surely would in spite of the silly affair with Willett

Renshaw. Following this thought pity began to get the better of anger. The fiercely resentful but still desolate figure on the cot rose before her, and she tried to understand what others thought. This beautiful home, the handsome clothes, this man, all were surely that girl's; but she, Elsie, had possession of them. No wonder Una was resentful. It was foolish, of course. Neither was to blame. But Elsie wondered after all whether she, in the situation of that other, would have done any better, been any more reasonable. If she, shot suddenly into luxury and beauty, had felt desolate and forlorn, what must that poor girl feel who was thrust into what was surely for her utter desolation! No wonder she was unreasonable. Probably she was half out of her mind, though her mother could not guess it.

Elsie lay awake all the first half of that night. Hour after hour she stared into the darkness. But she was quieter and her brain was clearer. The more she thought of it, the more she felt that she ought to have made greater efforts to approach Una Hamby, that she ought not to have given way to resentment so soon. She had everything, where the other girl had nothing. She must not forget that. It was more especially her place to help, to act. She would. She would go back, and despite rebuffs she would somehow contrive to let Una know that she was fair-minded, that she wanted to do anything she

could to right a wrong. Well, not a wrong, for certainly neither was to blame. And as yet she could not see — could not get even a dim idea after hour upon hour of thought and puzzling — what could be done, what either could do, in so strange and mad a case. Could anything right so great a muddle, short of the death of one or both?

Well, at least Una should have a chance to say what she wanted. Elsie would meet her more than half-way, would go just as far as she dared, to show she was at least honest in mind. It would be hard but she would go back to the hospital. To-morrow she would go.

CHAPTER X

VISITING hours at the hospital were from two to five; and a few minutes after two Elsie was again walking up the steps of St. Stephen's. She sighed as she did so. Would the day ever come when, having made every utmost effort that could be required of her, she would be acquitted and left to live — whatever life was left her — in peace?

She was relieved on entering Room 236 to find that Mrs. Hamby was not yet there. Neither was the nurse in the room at the moment. These two things helped to relieve her of at least a certain amount of embarrassment. She walked quietly over to Una Hamby's bed, drew a chair close to the head of it, and sat quietly down. Una had seen her the moment she entered the doorway and she watched every movement in tight-lipped silence and with a wide-eyed stare. Obviously she was amazed at this speedy second visit; and seemingly, too, she sensed some determination, some special mission, on her visitor's part.

Elsie leaned slightly toward her and spoke in almost an undertone:

"I know you don't want to see me again. But I

had to come. When I got home and thought things over I was sorry I gave way to temper so soon. I thought perhaps you, too, might have been thinking things over and might have seen that you were — were a little unreasonable.” She paused. But if Una’s feelings toward her visitor had undergone any modification since the night before, the effect was not apparent in the expression of the cold gray eyes, the contemptuous curve of the lips. But Elsie hastened on. She was going to say what she felt, what she meant, whatever came of it.

“I imagined myself situated as you are,” she went on then. “And I saw that unless you did think things carefully over, and so see how unreasonable it is, you might easily feel — as you do, toward me. Of course, I do seem to have everything. But what is the use of blaming me? I could n’t help what — what was thrust upon me.”

At the last words of this more or less faltering appeal Una Hamby’s eyes fairly blazed. She kept them fixedly on the face of the woman before her. The heartsick feeling began to creep back over Elsie; but she was determined. This time she was going to do all she dared.

“Just think a minute,” she pleaded. “Forget your anger toward me for a while. Just think how much better it would be for us to talk things over. Why, it’s the only way. And really, really, I want to do right, to do all I can. I have thought and

thought, and I can't see — But tell me what you think. If you will tell me —”

“No.” Una spoke the word in a low tone, but so vibrant with intense feeling was it, that Elsie felt it must have sounded all over the room. “I’ll tell you nothing.” She laughed, a mirthless but exultant laugh. “I thought as much. You’re scared, badly scared. And you thought you’d come here, and by acting the hypocrite get me to tell you of my intentions so that you could head them off to your own advantage.”

“I did n’t. That’s not true.” Elsie made a quick protesting movement. “I am frightened, just as you must be, but just now I was only thinking of helping you.”

Una’s lips curled in disbelief. “Thanks very much. When I am ready for your help I shall take it. But it won’t be at all in your way. It will be in my own time and in my own way.”

So strictly personal, so insulting almost, did this girl’s animosity seem, that Elsie felt her temper rising again. Probably it was a temper none too easy to control at the best.

“You are foolish,” she said in a very low voice and very curtly. “Evidently you have n’t the power to think round a question. You seem not to realize the terrible danger of your position. What can you gain by an attitude like this? You will have only yourself to blame if, when the time comes, you have

an unscrupulous woman to deal with, instead of one who wants, who is trying, to think and do somewhere near right. As near as we can come to it, anyway. You should remember that at present I have the upper hand. And though it is evident you have the memories of —”

“Memories! Oh!” Una laughed — a little, choking laugh. “Yes. I can remember — everything. But memory will have nothing to do with it. I shall have proof.”

“No proof that you can bring can take away from me what — what I have if I choose to keep it,” Elsie replied sharply.

“But I can ruin you so that the possession of it will do you little good.”

“Maybe,” agreed Elsie, wearily. “But I don’t know. Somehow I feel there is a limit to the harm one person is permitted to do another.”

“Does n’t seem so,” sarcastically.

Elsie sat silent for a moment or so. Evidently she was to fail again — fail in every way, either to impress this girl or to keep her temper. She sighed.

“Then you are determined that you won’t — won’t meet me half-way and — talk things over?”

“I certainly am determined,” looking at her with straight, scornful eyes. “So please take my word for it and don’t come here again. People are not helpless, at the mercy of others, even if they are in a hospital, and I won’t be annoyed by you. I hate

maudlin stuff. I hated you before you came, but now I despise you. I did think you had backbone enough at least to stand up and play your part."

Elsie got up. She looked down on the girl with a quiet smile. "I have," she said. "From now on that is just what I shall do — attend to my part. And I think, when the time comes, I shall be acquitted of all blame where you are concerned."

"No doubt — by yourself."

"You're so absolutely unreasonable," flashed out Elsie in sheer exasperation. It was useless; but this girl's attitude toward her, dangerous as it must be, was so utterly childish and senseless that she could not restrain herself. "I can't see how in the world you can blame me."

"It is heartless of me," agreed Una scoffingly, "when of course the universe is made for your taking."

"Oh!" Elsie gave a little gesture of hopeless impatience and turned to go. "Well, good-by, Una Hamby."

She uttered the name more to hear it herself than anything. Henceforth, as far as she was concerned, that was what the girl should be.

"Adieu, Elsie Leland," returned Una mockingly.

Elsie turned away. On her way toward the door she was called by the woman in the bed nearest the door. Quick, almost greedy to grasp at any sign of friendliness, Elsie paused and smiled. The

woman, an elderly person with a mild face, motioned to the little table at the side of her bed upon which stood the rosebuds.

"She — your friend — does n't care for flowers, I suppose," she said, "so Nurse gave them to me. I wanted you to know how I am enjoying them."

"I'm so glad." Elsie's smile was whole-hearted and sweet. "They have fulfilled their mission."

"Yes — the wonderful, sweet things," breathed the woman, glancing adoringly at them. "I lie here and just marvel and marvel at them."

Elsie looked at her. The face was worn and pale but placid. "Are you getting well fast?" she inquired. "Do you expect soon to be out of here?"

"I fell and fractured my hip," answered the woman with a nod and a smile. "No, I shall have to be here quite a while yet."

"Oh! Well, I hope you will be well as soon as possible," said Elsie. With a smile and the slightest little friendly pat on the hand that lay on the bed, Elsie passed on out into the corridor. It was a very slight incident, but somehow it comforted her out of proportion to its importance.

As she went home and as she dressed for dinner Elsie was conscious of a sharp contradiction. On the one hand she experienced a distinct sense of relief. Una Hamby had relieved her of all responsibility as far as any decision concerning her went. On the other hand, the girl had increased Elsie's

sense of dread. The shadow of this inimical personality would be ever behind Elsie and the sword of threatened vengeance suspended above her head. And Una was doubly equipped; for she had memory, the memories of both, which gave her full knowledge of Elsie's past and enabled her to play Una's part in life with perfect ease. Elsie could not even speculate as to how Una would begin to work. If she told only the truth no one would believe her, and Elsie doubted whether even Una would be foolish enough for that. No, she could not guess how Una would work; and in the uncertainty lay her greatest dread.

As she thought and thought Elsie was alarmed again at the lightning-like pains that from time to time shot through her head. Her eye-sockets felt like fiery caverns. It was time to call a halt. She must reduce things to their simplest possible terms, give herself a working formula, and stick to it. She must; otherwise brain fever at the least, or perhaps madness, lay not so far ahead of her.

Still, after dinner, as she and Alan sat reading — presumably, on Elsie's part — she was at it again, thinking, turning, twisting. She wondered — Why could she not run away while yet she was safe? What could she do to earn a living? Not a vestige of stenography remained in her memory. The other woman had that, along with recognition of her mother and countless other things. She thought of

distant cities; of cloak-and-suit models; of sales-ladies in department stores; of factories many and various — turning ideas and images over in her mind like so much rubbish in an attic. Something must be found. The present situation was intolerable.

Then, suddenly — as if a child, turning hurriedly and petulantly the leaves of a picture-book, had seen the book quietly closed and removed — it was borne in on her that she had not to do anything. How soon she had forgotten the startling lesson that had been given her! What had she had to do with coming here? Nothing. And she could not believe she had been placed in this set of circumstances just for the purpose of scrambling out of them. No doubt she could do that — wilfully get up and go. That much freedom of action was hers. It would also be hers to take the consequences of whatever she did. No. All she had to do — all she *dared* to do — was her very utmost best with each amazing day as it came. The outcome was not hers to meddle with.

This thought, which amounted to a profound conviction, settled into Elsie's mind with a sense of power and peace. It replaced with a feeling of security and authority the previous impatience, wounded pride, and uncertainty. She looked at Alan. Even this man — she had not been brought into his life for nothing; nor he into hers. She was sure of it — sure of it! Perhaps, even, it would be given to her to win his respect.

Strange are the ways of spirit, of which thought must always be the mode of transit. So strong and insistent was the voiceless call and demand of this woman upon him, that Alan Leland lost his hold upon the train of thought he was following in connection with the work he was doing. Deciding that he must be tired, he closed the book; and not knowing why, turned and glanced at Elsie. At first it was a casual glance; and then he looked at her curiously. Her hands were folded on the book on her lap, her lips parted in a faint, sweet smile, her eyes wide and living.

Leland turned his eyes away and sat and thought also. He had no doubts whatever of whom she was thinking; but even so, he was impressed with the inspired beauty of her face. Perhaps this time it was not merely the added gaiety her soul craved, but really something deeper, better. It was hard for him to credit it — of the Elsie of the last year or so. But still it was said that real love, once it was felt, reformed as well as informed. Once, in the first happy months of their married life, it had seemed as if love for himself were going to do this work for the gay young girl, reared as she had been in pleasure and selfishness. And he had hoped so much from the little child that had been about to come to them, but — Oh, well, what was the use of going over that again! Only that perhaps, instead of making it hard for her, making it a matter of more or

less disgrace if she chose, he ought to try to discover some way of releasing her himself and so giving her a fair chance. Some night, when his mind was clearer and he was not so tired, he would think the matter carefully and fairly over.

CHAPTER XI

ELSIE came in out of the garden one morning to find Alan at the desk in the living-room. It was the third of the month, though she had not recollected the fact. He called to her as she came in: "Just a moment, Elsie."

Elsie approached, noticing as she did so that he had a series of accounts, or documents of that kind, spread out before him.

"Annie is slowly but surely creeping up, month by month," he observed, with a smile of grim amusement. "I hope she has a limit and that we're pretty near it. Of course she's a good cook and a first-class servant, and all that. But— Perhaps you can think of a way of suggesting to her that she might be a little more artistic. Tell her proportion is one of the first requirements of art."

He handed over a bunch of accounts, mingled with checks, which Elsie received without comment, as she received everything and anything nowadays.

"Are you out of house cash?" he inquired.

Elsie nodded. With the exception of the five-dollar bill, she had not been able to discover any cash for whatever purpose among her predecessor's effects.

Alan signed a blank check and handed it to her.

She took it with a slight formal word of thanks and he glanced at her as he gathered the papers together on the desk. She certainly rather surprised him. She was not sulking; her face was quiet and purposeful. There was something about her lately that he could neither describe nor account for.

When Alan was gone Elsie sat down with the accounts and began a thorough investigation. Her face burned painfully. She — well, yes, it was she now — was evidently not wife enough to prevent this man being swindled by a servant.

She spread out the offending accounts — the grocer, the butcher, the creamery, gas, electricity, etc. Elsie did not know much about the cost of running a house of this size; but she felt sure, nevertheless, that the sums she looked at were out of all proportion for three people. She looked at the creamery bill and counted — and it was just for the current month — twenty-three pounds of butter alone. Her rage and disgust increased as she looked things over. Evidently Annie was thoroughly dishonest and unscrupulous; and the fact that her predecessor had evidently carelessly left everything to her made matters to Elsie's way of thinking that much worse. The checks that Alan had given her corresponded with each amount called for; and one — for fifty dollars — was made out to herself. She did not doubt, from what Addie McKeene had said, that this was her own personal allowance.

She picked up the bills and went into the kitchen. She was rapidly becoming more fearless in her grasp of things. And in any case disgust overcame any scruple she might have had against antagonizing a member of her new surroundings.

"Annie," she began. And Annie, who was washing dishes to a humming accompaniment, cut the accompaniment short and gazed at her mistress. "These bills get worse and worse each month. They're simply ridiculous and will have to be cut down."

"Master been kicking?" inquired Annie with an air of accustomed wisdom.

"That's not the question," returned Elsie curtly. "The thing is, there is something entirely wrong somewhere. And it's going to stop. Have you got all last month's slips?"

"Oh, no," replied Annie with sulky disdain. "Only some of them."

"Why — How is that? Don't you keep them?"

"Don't always come," explained Annie with lofty brevity.

Elsie reflected quickly. There was not the slightest use trying to rectify any of last month's irregularities. Next month should tell the tale.

"Well," she said then, "I shall call up each one of these firms and tell them that hereafter nothing will be taken in that has not an accompanying slip.

And I want you to keep each one. Have you a hook for them?"

Slight surprise mingled with disdain as Annie inclined her head slightly toward the wall forming the side of a cupboard upon which a bill clamp was fastened. Elsie nodded slightly.

"Well, please keep each and every slip in it. I shall look them over at the end of the month. And Annie," she added, a brilliant idea striking her as she turned to go, "come to me each morning and tell me what you want to order for the day."

With that she went, leaving Annie to her feelings, which were mostly indescribable. At first that irate and astounded person was for taking her hands out of the dish-pan, packing her things, and departing instant. But a moment's thought counseled prudence. There was much to be said for the place. She was uninterfered with in her work and allowed to go and come pretty much as she pleased. The work, too, was light; for the charwoman came one day a week and cleaned from cellar to basement; all washing went out, and the gardener kept the verandas, steps, and windows cleaned. And as for this wave of righteousness—it would pass off. Such waves always had. It was but an extended result of the accident, of whose significance Annie was fully aware. Indeed, she had talked it over very fully with the nurse at the time. And then again she had often seen her mistress in tantrums. Not quite

so businesslike and disconcerting as this one, of course. But it would pass. A month might be lost before things returned to normal; and during that time some awkward discrepancies might become apparent. It was unfortunate; but Annie decided that with the exercise of due care and diplomacy much of the effects, and also the results, of her mistress's newly acquired sense of duty could be headed off. To be sure, as a disciplinary measure, Annie evidenced her displeasure at the turn in events by being sulky and somewhat noisy. But she met so straight and uncompromising a glance from her mistress that she decided to postpone all measures until that lady's fit of temper should have worn off.

After leaving the kitchen Elsie pondered the troublesome account question still further. Then she went to the telephone and called up Addie McKeene. Very close intimacy had evidently existed between her and that other Elsie and this could not be allowed suddenly to lapse. Indeed, Elsie did not know that she altogether wished it to. She liked Addie. And here was a very safe subject to converse upon.

"I want some housekeeping advice," she told that little lady, as she heard her voice respond to the call.

"You want — what?" demanded Addie almost sharply.

"Housekeeping advice."

"Oh! certainly." Addie gave a soft little chuckle of pure amusement. "Come right over. I did attend a Domestic Science class once in the dear dead days. Probably a few shreds of knowledge still cling."

"I'll come over immediately after luncheon," said Elsie.

"You'll come over immediately now," responded Addie promptly. "Jim's got the electric outside, washing it, and I'll tell him to run round and get you."

Five or ten minutes later the electric was at the door, driven by a youth of about twenty. He gave Elsie a pleasant, deferential greeting, as Lottie the maid had done on that previous occasion.

Elsie tried to observe closely the direction in which they went as they glided along. She did note the general direction pretty well, and though unable to keep count of the actual turns, felt that she could find the house alone easily enough.

She found Addie, dainty and sweet and prettily coiffured, but in negligée attire. Her breakfast was still beside her.

"Dear! Such laziness!" commented Elsie, smilingly.

"Well, I was out so late," explained Addie calmly. "I was going to ring you up in a little while and tell you all you missed."

Elsie handed her wrap to the smiling Lottie and

seated herself in a big comfortable chair. "Well, I'm listening. Proceed."

"Presently," oracularly. "But first we must to business. Have a cup of coffee, kidlets."

"I had my breakfast long ago, thank you," with mock primness.

"Precisely — so long ago that I thought you could accommodate another," retorted Addie. And then, as Elsie shook her head and Lottie retired: "You need expert advice, I believe. Kindly state your case, madame."

Elsie explained, going into full details as to amount and kind. "Alan says he hopes Annie has some limit set," she concluded. "But I don't believe she has. You know, somehow or other I have taken a dislike to her."

"Humph!" Addie gave a queer little grunt. "You've been long enough about it. I always did detest her, as you know. I don't believe she has a speck of conscience."

"I don't either," agreed Elsie whole-heartedly. Then, with a frown, "But, you see, I don't know what expenses should be, exactly. What are your monthly expenses, Addie?"

"Oh, goodness, childie! they vary so! Depends upon how much entertaining I do, and all that. And then our housekeeping is so mixed — cash and account. You see, the butter and eggs come in from the country. And we have no meat or vegetable ac-

count. Those things Lottie goes and picks herself from wherever they suit her best and has them sent out."

Elsie nodded with a sigh. "Lottie is a peach."

"Indeed she is," almost affectionately. "You know, Elsie, I always did tell you you left things too much to Annie. I knew it would have to end some day."

"It will," said Elsie, portentously. "'Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh.'" "

"Yes. But unfortunately we shall also see what Pharaoh will do to thee," rejoined Addie, quietly. "And it will be plenty."

She was curled comfortably in her chair, her head propped between her hand and the upholstery. And she watched her friend with eyes that, for all her laziness, sought and puzzled and conjectured, though she did not actually know she was puzzling, nor what it was she was vainly striving to catch and detect. Elsie's body and face were here; but that which she had learned to know as Elsie, which she would probably call her character — the one who stood behind that face and that body — was absent. It was all unprecedented; and so Addie could not consciously accept or consider such a state of affairs.

"Well," she went on then, "what are you going to do about it? How are you going to begin?"

Elsie woke up from a short reverie and detailed the action already taken in the matter.

"Dear me!" Addie chuckled. "Quite a beginning! As a gentle and diplomatic hint that something is wrong it is simply a work of art. I can only imagine one thing a shade more diplomatic, and that would be throwing a brick through the window."

Elsie laughed too. "I suppose I might have been a little more gradual. But I don't know. She might just as well understand at once that I'm tired of such abuse of trust and that it has got to stop. If only," she went on frowningly, "I knew just how things ought to be, myself. But I suppose I can learn."

"I suppose you can," agreed Addie, though a trifle dubious apparently. "I wish I could help you, kidlets. Of course I can always get any information you want, from Lottie. But in matters like these I know less than you do, if anything. Lottie manages everything. If she should marry or — or anything, I positively don't know what I should do," tragically. "However, 'Sufficient unto the day.' I suppose I should learn in a hurry — Should have to. I'm afraid," she went on reflectively, "Annie's going to lead you a terrible life while she is being reformed."

"Oh, I don't know." Elsie's eyes narrowed ominously. "She is a good cook and a good worker but — There are others."

"Yes. But from all I hear they are peculiarly hard to find. Better go gently," counseled Addie.

"The very fact that she knows you are watching the bills will help, I fancy. She won't feel she can be quite as wholesale. See how that works before you do anything rash. Meantime keep your eyes open."

Elsie digested this sage advice and decided that it was good. "I will," she nodded. "Act on that advice, I mean. And now," she added in a tone that clearly dismissed that matter for the time being, "tell me all about the time you had."

She listened while Addie leaned her cheek on her hand and told of the *matinée*, of a drive out to the automobile club-house, of the dinner on the veranda overlooking the river, of the informal dance afterward. She listened, also, to laughing and perfectly good-natured scraps of gossip about this and that person who was to her but a name, and interjected nods and laughs with care and precision. But it seemed to her such a farce, so unreal, that over and over again she found herself wondering that Addie did not sense an impostor and bid her begone. Her new home, her threatened tilt with Annie, Alan and the rankle of his opinion of her, these things were beginning to seem real. They were issues in which she was already vitally interested. But Addie McKeene and the life she glimpsed were like side scenes viewed from a distance. Personally she liked Addie very much, would have liked to be able to enter into the merry, care-free life she seemed to lead. But that same life, the means she evidently had at her

command, her way of looking at things, made it impossible that Addie could ever enter very extensively into the life that Elsie hoped to shape for herself, or perhaps to work at while it was shaped for her. For she felt what it was going to be — a constant overcoming, a ceaseless round of difficulties to be faced, a long, lonely fight, perhaps to victory and perhaps not. Still, in the meantime, she really liked this bright, sweet-natured woman enough to be anxious not to slight her or hurt her feelings.

“Cora Starrett is giving an affair at the golf links this afternoon,” Addie chattered along. “She expects me to be there. But I’m not going. Say, Mrs. Leroy Yorke was telling me about the new couple at the Athenian. Says they’re much better than Robert Dean and his partner. Says the man is a dream of grace. And I suppose,” she laughed, “all the men say she is. Let’s drop in this afternoon. I’ll have Jim rush you home directly after lunch so that you can dress. And get out your runabout. We might want to take others and run out to the club.”

For a second Elsie was taken aback. But her intuition was quick and facile. She had noticed that their garage was double, though she had never investigated it. Doubtless it contained a machine that was supposed to be devoted to her own special use. She felt cheap and disconcerted; but there was only one thing to do — refuse. She shook her

head at the surprised Addie, and for once felt perfectly safe in telling the simple truth.

"Addie, I can't drive that machine yet."

Addie opened her eyes and stared comically at her friend. "Why — why — Has that accident turned you against machines, then?"

"Yes, for a time." Then she went on lamely. "Oh, Addie, I suppose you'll be awfully disgusted with me! But — I don't want to go to the dansant, either. I — Oh, I don't feel equal to it, yet."

Addie leaned her cheek back on her arm reflectively. "I believe, after all, that I am down on your black-list."

"Oh, Addie, don't talk like that!" Elsie leaned forward impulsively and stroked the hand that lay on her friend's lap. Somehow she felt sure that, as far as her conception of the word went, this woman had been a good little friend for years. "I — I don't know." She passed her hand distressedly across her face. "I'm so awfully restless."

"I see it," Addie nodded believingly. "All the while I have been talking I could see it. You listened — tried to — but your eyes were full of something else. What do you mean by 'restless'?" she queried, suddenly bethinking herself.

"Just that," quietly. "When I'm away from home I long to be back there; and when I'm there I want to pace up and down like a caged tiger."

Addie considered her companion long and ear-

nestly. "Well, it's either something Alan has done or else you're not well yet," she decided.

"Oh!" Elsie laughed and stood up, stretching her slim, lithe body with power and ease. "I'm well enough. Could n't very well be any better."

"Your body is well," said Addie, tersely.

Elsie would not stay to luncheon and in view of what she had said Addie would not press her. Neither would she be driven home, but insisted on walking.

On reaching home, before entering the house Elsie went into the garage to look over her newly discovered possession. It was a smart-looking dark blue six-cylinder roadster, with fawn upholstery and white wire wheels. Elsie stood a minute staring at the handsome thing. Whatever would she do with it? Then true to her resolution she walked suddenly out of the garage. She had not to do anything with it to-day. And time would show.

One other investigation Elsie still had to make regarding her home and she decided that the afternoon before her presented as good a chance as any. She wanted to sort and read carefully through the papers in the desk in her bedroom. They might contain much valuable information.

Nothing happened to change this decision. And so immediately after lunch she sat down before the dainty and much overladen desk. She sorted and read carefully through the contents. Most of the

letters and papers contained conveyed no especial meaning to her, but she found two letters from an address in Paris signed "Your Mother." She considered them gravely for a few minutes and then put them aside with a sigh and a certain feeling of relief that France was as far off as it was.

Among other things Elsie found in one of the desk drawers a bank-book with a balance of seven dollars. The entry and withdrawal dates were quite recent and the book was nearly filled. It gave Elsie both a sudden idea and a slight shock. She went downstairs and got a book in which she had seen Elsie Leland's name inscribed. She studied the inscription — Eloise Van Duyn Leland — and then got a sheet of paper to see if it had been written by the owner herself and how near she could come to it.

The result was mainly satisfactory. She had no other idea of that name in writing but that one which was before her. Her hand was evidently trained to write it that way and did so. The signature looked a little stiff, but that was doubtless due to the fact that she wrote slowly and consciously. However, she decided to allow that seven dollars to remain in the bank indefinitely. She would open an entirely new account as soon as she had anything much to bank.

Elsie had at least one pleasant hour that afternoon. That was the hour, or more, that she spent

dressing — for dinner, as she termed it to herself. With the deepest interest and care she dressed her hair, studying the lines of her coiffure from every angle. And then she put on a simply-made gown of chiffon velvet of a rare golden-brown shade. With her hair and eyes, it made a wonderful study in color, which Elsie was artist enough to note. Then she went down and watched for Alan to come; and when he did come, woman-like, she was deep in the pages of "Vogue."

When he came down into the living-room a few minutes before the gong sounded, Elsie took out of the library table drawer, where she had placed it that morning, the check for the fifty dollars made out to herself. She held it out. "Is this — ?"

Leland glanced at it and then at her. "It's your check, of course. What about it?"

"Nothing." She replaced it in the drawer. "I just thought —" She did not exactly know what to say.

But Leland continued to look her straight in the face. "Did n't you think I was going to give it to you this month, then?"

"Oh, I have n't done any thinking about it," replied Elsie shortly.

"Diplomatic relations are not severed yet," said Leland with a smile of faint amusement. "Until they are, financial arrangements will remain unchanged."

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Elsie had told Addie McKeene that she was restless, she had spoken the truth mildly. And instead of decreasing, this restlessness grew upon her day by day. Not only did the uncertainty and the faintly defined sense of dread under which she lived tend to make and keep her restless, but it seemed as if her body demanded something — ached and longed for something. And so tremendously full of vital power was it that it seemed to Elsie sometimes as if the life that surged and flamed and expanded within her must surely show through her skin as a rosy light. Sometimes it was actually true, as she had said, that she wanted to pace the floor like a caged animal.

She did her utmost so to fill her life that the eager, aching body could not drive her back and forth. She went to the best teacher of piano and also to the best vocal teacher that she could hear of; and on the work that both gave her to do she drilled with obstinate, dogged energy. At first, at least once a minute, she would have to bring back to the page she was studying, or the tone she was making, the impatient, restless mind; often it seemed that she

was holding herself on the piano stool by sheer force, as if her limbs would rise and walk off with her. It made no difference whether the reward was worth the awful minute-by-minute struggle. It had to be done.

She studied and watched, too, to familiarize herself with the details of her home life and the successful running of the house. She learned the day the charwoman came, and made it her business to be at home that day, although here she surmised that for her own sake Annie would see that the required amount of work was done. She perceived that the gardener came two days a week, that in addition to his gardening he hosed the verandas off and swept and hosed out the garage. She learned that the Chinaman came at nine o'clock every Monday morning, that Annie collected the house linen and Alan's, that she had merely to contribute her own. She attended to the cut flowers on the dining-table and elsewhere, and judged by Annie's half-amused glances that this performance was receiving more than the usual attention at her hands.

But while she was forcing this new diet, mental and otherwise, on herself, allowing no compromise, no relief along the hard road, she was a starved entity. And seeing that the statement that man cannot live by bread alone is an actual as well as abstract fact, she suffered much as a starving person does.

"Yes. Have to do it to keep from wanting things," she explained to Addie one day, when that lady came in upon her as she was playing almost furiously velocity exercises, and stared unbelievably from the heavily printed page to Elsie herself. "I keep on wanting, wanting. I'm just one big bundle of wants." She wheeled round on the piano stool and clasped her hands, smiling whimsically. "What do you suppose is the matter with me?"

"I'll tell you what is the matter with you," responded Addie promptly, almost impatiently. "You've got some foolish idea of reforming, turning over a new leaf, or whatever it is you call it, and you've simply cut out of your life at one sweep everything you've ever been accustomed to. And you can't do it. It's not humanly possible to upset suddenly the habits it has taken a lifetime to form. But you'll go on, I suppose, until you break down, have nervous prostration or something like that. Then, when illness breaks down that horribly obstinate spirit of yours, you'll come to your senses."

Elsie laughed, unoffended. "No, I sha'n't — have nervous prostration, I mean."

"Well, you'll see," with ominous conviction. "And that reminds me of what I came more particularly for. You don't feel impelled to waste that perfectly good box at the opera, do you? Last of the season, you know."

"Yes. Why, no — I sha'n't waste it," ventured Elsie. "You're going, are n't you?"

"Well, I should think so! One does n't waste Mary Garden seats. He gave it to both of us, you know," with a puzzled glance at the other.

"I know," quickly. Then, to cover some evident mistake: "I was only thinking —"

"Just tell Alan you're going with me," arranged Addie promptly. "And I'll call for you."

"All right. That will be lovely," with a nod that was as much relief as acquiescence.

Addie stayed to luncheon, which an exceedingly sulky Annie prepared. The girl was the unconscious source of much amusement to Addie, who insisted on hearing full details of the domestic campaign, suspecting that the luckless Annie shared with the music pages the task of diverting some of her mistress's over-abundant energy. This, in a way, was true. Elsie was determined to have something like justice done to her accounts; but she pursued the matter with an unceasing vigilance that to Annie must have seemed nothing short of vindictive. Its thoroughness left nothing to be desired, though of this Annie was not so well able to judge. For what was really the result of a simple method had the outward appearance of pure observation and an uncomfortably exact memory. As a matter of fact, not caring to go into the kitchen and constantly refer to the slips, Elsie kept a private list of each

day's orderings. One glance at this was sufficient to show the number of days that had elapsed between the duplicating of the order for each article.

After Addie's departure Elsie went upstairs to lay out and arrange her dress for the night. She had already discovered, examined and admired a lovely and evidently costly gown of georgette and lace in a pale, exquisite shade of pink. And with this she put out a theater coat of cream broadcloth, whose folds held a satin-like richness. In the heavy French gilt jewel-case, in a handsome case of its own, was an exceptionally beautiful garnet necklace. Elsie had never seen so many garnets together; and she laid the necklace against her neck again and again, admiring the star-like clusters of stones, welling their soft, rich light. She decided to wear that also. It was not very often she could wear anything quite so handsome.

She speculated somewhat as to the donor of the opera box, though from the way Addie had spoken she suspected it was the unknown Willett Renshaw. She wondered with faint discomfort whether or not Alan had any reason to divine the true state of affairs. However, that must be trusted to luck. The box had been arranged for before she came on the scene; and now, without offending Addie, and looking ridiculous, she could not very well avoid making use of it.

Though Elsie was more or less on the *qui vive* during every minute of Alan's presence in the house, and although every conversation that took place — desultory as they were — constituted a battle of wits for her, still she watched for his arrival each night and was keenly disappointed when, as happened now and again, work up the line detained him and he did not come home for dinner. And not for a moment, until to-day, had she considered anything that would take her out for the evening. Indeed, Addie, from sheer impatience, had ceased to propose anything; and only the fact that she was an exceedingly good-natured little body, and that she sensed that something entirely out of the ordinary was happening to her friend, kept Mrs. McKeene from a state of actual offense and estrangement.

At dinner that evening Elsie allowed several convenient gaps in the conversation to go by without announcing her plans for the opera. Though as he talked to her, Alan necessarily glanced at her from time to time, still those glances dwelt no length of time upon her face, and were not disconcerting; she dreaded somewhat the occasions when he really looked at her with intent to observe. Alan Leland was deliberate both as to speech and glance; in fact, his glance was slow almost to laziness. But if the glance was slow, the mind behind it was not. It seemed to Elsie that never had she met eyes that

knew and discerned so much. He was a man of very few questions and Elsie had an uneasy feeling that he rarely needed to ask any.

However, before dinner was over she managed to say in a commendably casual way, "I'm going to the opera with Addie to-night. It's Mary Garden, you know."

"Yes?" He looked at her and there was no reading the cool, indifferent eyes. "Have you the tickets, then?"

"She has."

He made no further comment. Somehow Elsie wished he would. She wondered whether he cared for music and whether he had ever been in the habit of attending with her events like this one. There was no way — no safe way — of finding these things out, and so she let the thought go and went up to her room and forgot her uneasiness in the delight of donning beautiful clothes.

So interested did she become and so quickly did time fly in the elaborations of her toilet, that when the pretty chime of Addie's electric sounded she was still up in her room. Catching up her coat and slipping her arms into it as she went, she hurried down the staircase, reaching the foot of it just as Annie admitted the radiantly pretty Mrs. McKeene. To Elsie's surprise Addie stepped quickly up to her and drew the coat together at the neck.

"Does n't that hook up closer? These evenings

are still quite chilly." She was frowning fiercely. Then she turned to Alan who, upon her arrival, had risen and laid aside his book. "Well, Alan, I see Mary Garden has no charms for you."

"Yes and no." From his superior height Alan looked down pleasantly enough upon the pretty woman before him. He smiled amusedly too because, of course, her remark was entirely superficial, and both knew it.

"Meaning — ?"

"That in some things she is a very interesting study."

"Oh." Addie met the lazily discerning eyes with but a fleeting glance. "If we were n't rather late as it is I should want to thrash that out. I believe in that way I could acquire a most thoughtful and learned criticism of the famous Mary with which to confound my more intellectual friends. But I postpone it merely. Please have it ready on demand." She gave him a swift, laughing glance and with a little farewell nod, joined Elsie at the door.

In the electric she turned suddenly upon the surprised Elsie. "Well, had you forgotten it?" she demanded, indicating with a wave of the hand anywhere in the region of Elsie's neck. "Do you suppose you can fool a man like Alan into believing that you are paying for a necklace like that out of fifty a month?"

Swift, pained understanding followed instantly on

surprise in Elsie's mind. "Yes. I — I had forgotten," she said apologetically.

"Well, if you're getting so forgetful as all that, you'd better put the things that — that have been given you — one side."

"Yes. I wonder," speculated Elsie artfully, after a moment's pause, "whether they would n't all go into the case with this. Then I'd lock it up separately."

"Don't see why not." Addie was watching her swift way down the well lighted street. "There is n't anything but the pearl marquise and the sunburst besides, is there?"

"That's all," relieved. "Well, they're going into seclusion," grimly.

"Oh, no need to go to extremes," said Addie in a businesslike way. "Just be careful. That's all."

In the theater box, waiting for the curtain to go up, Elsie turned to her companion with a half-triumphant smile. "And so you don't think Alan is so easily fooled, after all?"

"Why, I never did think he was," replied Addie, in some surprise. "What I've always said was that he ought to be sensible in what he expects of you, knowing what kind of life you led before he took you."

Elsie wondered what that life could have been, but necessarily refrained from any comment.

"He's a man one could like awfully well," went

on Addie thoughtfully, "if he were not such a crank."

"He's quite nice with you," said Elsie with a smile.

"Oh, yes." There was almost a trace of resentment in Addie's tones. "But I know very well that I've been added up and have gone down on his list of values as a big zero."

"Well, you're not alone," with a slight and perfectly involuntary smile.

Addie glanced at her. "Are you ambitious to rise in the scale of valuation?"

"It would n't do me any good to be ambitious," replied Elsie a trifle ambiguously.

CHAPTER XIII

SO completely engrossed had Elsie been by the problems already on hand at home she had almost forgotten for the time being Willett Renshaw and the problem that he was sure eventually to present. And so she gave a decided start when, on answering the telephone bell shortly after luncheon one afternoon, she heard the voice that already she knew by reason of its unusual beauty and resonance.

"Is that you, Elsie?"

"Yes."

There was the short, reflective pause that by this time she was becoming accustomed to. And then, "Well, dear?"

"Well," she replied, with a slight, nervous laugh. "When did you get back?"

"Last night. It seems so good to hear your voice again," went on the voice with its caress and romance. "I've had an awfully pleasant time, but every now and again I'd hunger for you. Did you for me?"

"Just simply starved," responded Elsie with a curl of the lips that under the circumstances was harmless.

Again that short listening — of the understanding, as it were. Then, "What time will you be over this afternoon?"

"I was n't planning to come over this afternoon."

"Oh. But you will plan now, won't you?"

"N-no — I don't think so." She tried to make the words sound as pleasant as possible.

"Oh!" The vibrant voice showed no signs of temper. "I saw Addie last night. She was dining at Cliquot's with the Pennocks. I commissioned her to bring you over this afternoon and she promptly returned the commission. I knew from the way she spoke that something was still wrong. What is it?"

"Why — nothing. What should there be?"

"Are you vexed that I stayed down south so long?"

"Why, of course not. How silly!"

"I would have returned sooner if I had thought that you wanted me," went on the voice calmly. "One of the reasons that I did n't hurry was that I wanted to give you a chance to get over the moodiness that you were showing before I went. Whatever the trouble is, it still exists, I see. I think it must be something more than mere moods. So we'll thrash it out at once."

"Will we?" without giving the matter any very serious thought. She had made up her mind not

to meet this man except in a casual way. She would meet him doubtless — that would be sure to happen — but not by appointment.

“Yes. Will you come over?”

“Oh — not this afternoon.”

“Just as you please,” coolly. “I’ll be over in a few minutes then. The machine is outside.”

Elsie fairly gasped. “It seems to me you are carrying things with a very high hand,” she said indignantly.

“Not at all, dear little lady. If things had not been with us as — well, as they were up to the time of that fool upset, I might perhaps accept such a sudden change of front as a mere example of a woman’s whimsicality. But — Oh, well, it’s ridiculous, of course. There has n’t been time for you to experience a real change of feeling. You’re adopting an attitude for some reason or other. I have an idea what that reason is, and it’s a foolish one. The present is all that ever matters. You know what — is n’t it Byron? — says:

“The past is nothing —”

“Go on,” commanded Elsie, more to be saying something than because she wanted to hear the remainder of the quotation, whatever it might be.

“— and at last,

The present can but be the past!”

Elsie sighed slightly. "Well, there's some comfort in that."

"Of course. It's the key to most situations," coolly. "Wherefore, attend strictly to the present —"

"Because out of it the future comes," injected Elsie quickly.

Renshaw laughed unaffectedly. "I see you've been staying at home sharpening up your repartee. I shall have to be careful where I tread or I shall have my head in a noose in no time. I'll collect my wits carefully on the way out. Good-by for a few minutes." He seemed about to hang up.

"Wait a minute," commanded Elsie, sharply. She was horrified at the idea of his coming to the house. She might not be able to get rid of him just when she wanted. Evidently, for all his pleasant speech, he was not a man to be easily handled. "You know it won't be — well for you to come here," she said hurriedly. "And I don't want to come down to the city this afternoon. What —?" She hesitated. What had she been in the habit of doing, she wondered.

"Well, go round to Addie's," he said in a tone that indicated that as a usual procedure.

"Supposing Addie is n't going to be in?" demurred Elsie.

"I'll call her up and see," calmly. "Hang up and I'll call you in a few minutes."

Elsie obeyed and sat nervously biting her lips, baffled, bewildered, a sense of greater difficulty than ever before lowering over her. She was conscious, too, of a feeling of rage and obstinacy. Why should she be forced to be pleasant and considerate to this man if she did not want to be? But then, after a few minutes, common reasonableness thrust itself upon her mood. It was quite plain upon what terms of lover's intimacy this man and that other Elsie had been. It was not to be expected that he would accept a complete and sudden reversal of affairs without at least an explanation. She had been foolish ever to suppose he would. And what explanation could she make? She might tell him, of course — as she would have to — that she wished and intended to end things. But he would naturally demand to know why, and, he had almost a right to that much consideration. Because, in the building up of the present state of affairs, her predecessor had undoubtedly been at least an equal party. It was not, as he said, possible for any one to experience any very decided change of heart in so short a space of time; and if it were some vexation or offense — what?

She wondered what that probable thing was that he had in mind as a reason for her change of front. From the fairly casual way in which he had spoken, she did not think it could be anything to do with — Oh, no. Una Hamby could not have approached

him yet, even if she ever did intend to risk anything as open as that. But thinking of Una made Elsie's nervous frown deepen. On her account alone she could not deal with Willett as she would like. She must not furnish corroboration of, or lend strength to, any statement she might choose to make in future. Elsie thought the thing over and over; and then, in Willett's case as in every other, she finally had to leave things to the lucky inspiration of the moment. Except that the affair must end. That was all she really knew as yet.

In a few minutes the bell near her rang. She took down the receiver.

"It's all right," said the voice lightly. "Just in time to catch her."

"To catch her," echoed Elsie. "Why, did you make her stay in?"

"Why, of course," with a laugh. "Don't we need her? That won't hurt her. She was n't going anywhere in particular, anyway. Now, put on your wrap and go round, Lily Girl. I'm going straight out."

Elsie agreed quietly enough, hung up, and went straight upstairs. She sat down in her favorite chintz chair and folded her arms in a sort of quaint attitude of resignation. Another ordeal! Well, there was one thing: nowadays she did not tremble so much inside as at first. One can get used to anything, so they say; and the unknown and the un-

usual were becoming the usual with her. The concentration discipline, too, that she was giving herself had done much for her.

She glanced down at her dress. She was still in the smoke-gray cloth, for which she had conceived a great affection. Nothing else suited her for morning wear. But it would not do for an afternoon occasion. She went to the wardrobe closet and considered; and though she did not know it, the eternal woman in her was uppermost as she did so. She did not know this man she was going to meet; she was prepared not to like him and did not want him to like her. But she had not the least idea in the world of putting on anything unbecoming in which to go forth to the meeting. She chose the gown of golden-brown chiffon velvet.

Elsie was never too much perturbed to stand and lovingly admire herself in each combination of color and line as she put it on. She felt that she was not admiring herself — not in the least. That was the strange part of it. As she looked now at the effect of her hair and eyes against the brown, she decided that her predecessor had either had excellent taste and color sense, or else her dressmaker had had them for her. High shoes of a deep cream kid, a belted coat of tan Bolivia, a brown sailor of beaver felt, and she was ready to walk round to Addie's.

She did not hurry at all in her walk. In fact, she almost dawdled. But it seemed to her that she was

there in no time. Addie herself opened the door.

"Oh, you walked," she commented.

"Yes. One of the lost arts," smiled Elsie.

She entered and a man arose from one of the largest of Addie's many lounge chairs. His attitude in the chair was so easy that Elsie was somehow surprised to see a big man come toward her. Forgetting how it might seem, she gazed almost breathlessly at him. She saw an indisputably handsome man — a study in black and white, at first glance; very dark hair and eyes, and brows with a faint whimsical upcurve. His skin was sallow, but with a healthy pallor. He had the air of a man who all his life had had, and immediately, anything and everything he wanted, including the deference and obedience of others. But the air, far from being assumed, seemed to exist in spite of him, and in spite of an easy, unobtrusive manner.

"Give me your coat," exclaimed Addie, breaking in on her fascinated gaze. "You two are going to quarrel most frightfully. I can see it coming. And I'm going to skip upstairs until the storm is over."

"No, we're not," cried Elsie, clutching at the retreating woman. "Don't go, Addie."

But Addie was already scampering with gleeful chuckles up the staircase.

Elsie gave a little helpless sigh and stood without making any move to enter the room. And Renshaw

stood and looked down at her, his eyes, curious and searching, traveling over every line of her face. And though she never suspected it, Elsie's face pleaded for her, showing forth an explanation of anything strange she had done or said. For though, to the man who knew her, not a line of the full oval face had shrunk, not a tint of the delicate, glowing skin had dimmed, yet in some purely spiritual way she looked worn and fretted, and her eyes, dilating with an almost extraordinary livingness, demanded and questioned as they looked into his.

Renshaw looked thoughtfully, intently, at her, puzzled by something he could not locate nor define. This woman was the same, and yet not the same, that he had left on the afternoon of the collision. That woman had been nearly won; this woman was retreating from him. This woman was physically within his grasp but spiritually already unapproachable. This latter Renshaw sensed rather than understood. But he did understand that this half-wistful, half-defiant being was more desirable than she had even been before. He smiled, and putting his hand gently under her chin, lifted her face. Then he bent and kissed her.

"Sweetheart!" he said very softly. Whatever prediction those who knew him might make as to the possible outcome of this infatuation, there was no doubting its present completeness.

He put his arm round her shoulder and led her

into the room. Elsie was too dazed to demur. There seemed nothing to do at present but follow his lead.

CHAPTER XIV

AS they reached the middle of the room, in a matter-of-fact way, very much as if she were some little girl who was to be soothed and comforted, Renshaw picked Elsie up, sat down in one of the big chairs, placed her gently on his knees, and then drew her down into his arms until her head rested against him.

Swept off her feet figuratively as completely as she was literally, Elsie made a queer little gasping remonstrance which passed entirely unheard. And then it seemed to her that for the moment she lost herself entirely, was conscious only of the physical contact, the strong pressure of his arms, of an utter cessation of all resistance—to fate, to anything. She drew closely to him and pressed her face hard against his coat. Feeling this movement, he held her still more closely and laid his face against her hair. And so they remained for a few minutes. Then Elsie goaded herself out of the strange physical weakness that had overcome her and made a movement to free herself from the encircling arms. He allowed her to sit upright, though his arms were still about her, and as she did so he kissed her gravely on lips and cheek. Elsie felt the color mount in a hot wave over face and neck.

"And now, sweetheart," he drew her back to him and laid his face against hers caressingly, "tell me all about it. What is the matter?"

Elsie did not reply. She hardly knew what to say and knew not at all how to say it. She knew what she wanted to convey, but now that she saw the man he himself was one of the biggest hindrances in the way of conveying it. He had already given her more sympathy, more real understanding, more tenderness, than she had known for — oh, than she had ever known, as far as she could remember! And whatever his motive, which she did not altogether know, or whatever his reputation, which again she did not specifically know, she could not despise him as she had thought to, could not even contemplate very seriously offending or hurting him. As in Addie's case, there was something too big and pleasant about him to be despised. Why should the personality of the sinner be always so much more pleasant than that of a saint? She knew now, of course, what she had to do, but she could not tell how to do it. So she was silent.

"I'm waiting, love," he reminded her with a slight movement of his cheek as it lay against hers. "Be frank with me now. It's just between you and me. What has happened?"

"Why, nothing," replied Elsie uneasily. "That is, nothing tangible."

"Well, what intangible?"

"Oh," impatiently. "It'll all sound silly to you."

"Never mind," calmly. "What is it?"

"Oh, only that —" still more impatiently — "that I've seen suddenly where I was going — and know that I must stop."

"Oh, is that all?" From his tone Elsie knew that he had expected something entirely different, and, somehow she gathered, something more weighty.

"All?" she echoed. "What did you expect, then? What did you mean when you said you thought you knew what — what I had in mind?"

"Oh, something of this kind." He stroked her hair soothingly. "But to return to your statement. Where were you going when you came to this sudden stop?"

"Where all women go who do as I do, I suppose."

He laughed and brushed her cheek indulgently with his lips. "I'm afraid I don't know the whereabouts of that universal bourne." Then with the faintest touch of impatience, born of a man's love of blunt logic, "Come now, dear. You were never one to hedge like this. How can one deal with an enemy that is n't even outlined? What has happened to frighten you so? What has changed my gay little lady-love into a distrait and worried woman? Tell me the whole truth."

"I want to," said Elsie desperately; "but I could never make you understand, entirely."

"Well, try. I'm not usually so dense. Do the best you can."

"Well, for one thing, I'm afraid of the divorce that is imminent unless I mend my ways. I'm afraid of being thrown on the world. I'm afraid of being thrown on the mercy of men," doggedly.

Renshaw did not reply for a moment. Elsie felt that she had confused impressions — said something that the other woman could not have been expected to say.

"You speak as if divorce meant just one thing and that one thing ruin," he observed then.

"Well, it does — does n't it?"

"Not necessarily. It means as many things as there are people who take that way out of a muddle," calmly. "Some divorcees end badly and so do some of every class."

"You talk like Addie," commented Elsie, with a dry little smile.

"Very likely. Addie has a good deal of common sense hidden behind that airy manner of hers."

"It is possible to reason from any premise," said Elsie, half wearily; "and not at all necessary even that the premise be correct."

"And what is this premise?"

"That a wrong life can end well," gently; "really well."

"Oh, I don't think a wrong life can. But what is a wrong life? That is a definition open to as many variations as there are points of view."

"That is quite true," agreed Elsie. "But what can any one, whatever his point of view, think of a woman who shares a man's home and money and name and then makes a mock of him?"

"Not much, to be candid," agreed Willett in his turn. "But why do it, then? Why share those things?"

"Well, but that brings me to my dread — to the divorce."

"You never used to have such a dread of it. In fact, you never gave it a thought at all, that I'm aware of," said Renshaw in a puzzled way. "Who has been frightening you? Who has been painting things so black? And even supposing for the sake of argument that you did get a divorce. Why, I can think of half a dozen women, divorced and married again, and leading successful lives."

"Hum." Elsie was dubious. "When they were plainly blameless in the case. Or else they were wealthy women who could defy public opinion."

"Not in every case. And if it's the money question that's bothering you —"

"It is n't." Elsie drew away from him as far as she could. "Don't think that. Don't misunderstand me." She smiled bitterly, realizing that she

could never convince him, because, in the first place, he did not intend to be convinced. He was not listening to her in order to enter into her feelings, her motives, in the case. Not at all. Only listening to grasp her present point of view in order to be in a position to argue it away. She sighed. "You won't believe it. Of course not. But I really do want to be a good woman as far as it's in me to be. I'm afraid that is n't very far, but —"

Renshaw laid his head back in the chair and gazed at her long and steadily. "And does your idea of being good constitute living with a man you don't care for and who no longer cares for you?"

"Yes, broadly speaking. That same man gives me an honorable standing."

"And is he the only one who could?"

"He is the only one who would."

"I see. You have n't a very high opinion of me, have you?"

"Oh, don't let's discuss it that way," said Elsie, deprecatingly. "There has never been any talk of — of marriage, or — or anything like that," she ventured.

"Not in so many words, perhaps. But we had come to know and realize that there was nothing possible for us but to be together."

"Oh, well, we may have thought that way for the time being," hazarded Elsie; "but we knew it

would n't last. You and I should n't be at all happy married," with a smile that apologized for the harshness of the words.

"Why?" Renshaw looked genuinely surprised. "Do you know of any two people more thoroughly comrades than we have been? I'm not going to pretend that I admire every bit of your makeup. I don't. Any more than you do all of mine. But I do say that no woman ever drew me to her as hard as you have." He put his arms closely round her again. "You can't have forgotten the times we have had together. It made no difference how much we might quarrel — the pull we had on one another was too much. It drew us back every time. Why, darling, remember that glorious time in the Silver Mountain camp! Remember those moonlight nights on the *Blue Bird*. Oh, you can't forget!"

"No. I forget nothing." This was true enough.

"Well, then. I can't conceive what has been done to you," he went on feelingly; "it's incredible — the change. I've never known a woman so reckless, so fearless in her splendid vitality, as you. I've never known a woman who faced the devil and the north wind, the dawn and the night, as you did. And now you're a timid, broken-spirited woman."

"No, not broken-spirited," objected Elsie, with sharp conviction. "I need more spirit — more real spirit — in what I am trying to do now than I ever needed in my life before." She looked at him,

bravely, but with a little involuntary sigh, pathetic in its weariness. "I know you're disappointed, disgusted. I think you have a right to be, in a way. I started out to be — something different. But it can't be helped. The woman you know has gone. Forget her. Please, please, believe me. I am not she."

"Well!" The whimsical upcurve of Renshaw's brows straightened out. "Perhaps not. But you're still near enough like her to be dearer to me than any other woman. I'll forget the other woman, as you say. But that does n't release you."

"Not when I tell you that I want you to — that you must?"

"No." The voice was heavy and almost harsh with determination. "A thousand times no. How can you tell me that you want me to, when a few minutes ago your body lay yielding against mine and your lips returned my kiss!"

"I was tired," said Elsie, falteringly.

"Perhaps so," coolly. "But that did n't give me the kiss."

Elsie drew her hand wearily across her brows. This was harder than anything she had yet had to do, because, for one thing, she could not quite comprehend her difficulty. Desiring the love of one man, she had deliberately given herself over to the caresses of another. For Willett Renshaw's love, as his love, she cared not at all; and yet the pressure of

his arms satisfied some longing, the touch of his lips, his face against hers, ministered to some ache. And the worst of it all was that she did not seem to have been allowed to decide for herself. Her body had literally stampeded her mind. And so what assurance had she that it would not happen again? She must get away by herself and try to think. She did not want to offend this man seriously. Now that she knew him, she could not dislike him. Besides, she did not know what hold he might have on her, which would appear if she defied him openly. Alone, after a while she could think it all out. Just now she could not.

Meanwhile Renshaw watched her closely, in his eyes a strange blending of expressions. For one thing, he mentally cursed that fool accident, and his own folly and carelessness that had at least contributed to it. It was evidently going to take him a long time to undo the effects upon this girl. And that afternoon she had been more nearly his than ever before; her spirit, reckless and vital, had flamed up to meet his. If only he had not allowed her to persuade him to turn back home! he was regretful; but his momentary anger had already died out. When he spoke again it was quite gently:

"And then, what about me, Elsie? Have I no part in this love that you propose to cast aside as no longer expedient?"

Elsie took the shielding hand down from her eyes

and smiled — a very wise, tired little smile. “Yes, a man’s part — which, you know, is always transferable.”

“Indeed?” Renshaw smiled too. “When did you take to sarcasm? And besides, I haven’t shown any signs of transferring, have I?”

“No.” Elsie’s smile deepened into real amusement. “Isn’t that all that is really troubling you? That has always been your prerogative, you know.”

“‘Always’?” with a slight uplifting of the brows. “How many are required to constitute that?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” thoughtfully. From what Alan had said she inferred a good many. “I’m not up in history. But I suppose — a few.”

“Yes,” imperturbably. “Always will be in the case of a man with a disposition to enjoy life, and time and money at his disposal. It’s merely an exchange of conveniences. The man barter his time and money for companionship in those pleasures which the women usually could not obtain for themselves. It’s understood on both sides, and no wrong done to either.”

“Yes. Of course. That’s the understanding we began with,” said Elsie, shyly.

“Yes, began. But in our case an unconsidered factor entered.” Elsie looked questioning. “The law of attraction.”

Elsie nodded. Then she sat quiet for a few min-

utes from sheer inability to decide what was the next best thing to do or say. All that she said failed of its point, it seemed. The striking of the bronze clock furnished an inspiration. It struck four.

"Oh, I must be going," she said, starting. "Let's call Addie."

He too had been thoughtful, his eyes resting on her face. Apparently he saw no use in prolonging the argument they had been pursuing. Having his mind made up, further discussion was more likely to be detrimental than useful. So he withdrew his arm from about her and allowed her to rise.

"I'm going to run upstairs to Addie for a minute or two. Will you wait?"

He nodded. "Yes, I suppose so."

She looked at the man still watching her and smiled, trying hard to make her smile a casual one.

"Well, do we understand each other? Have I made you understand?"

He rose, laid a hand lightly on her shoulder, and placing two fingers of his other hand under her chin, gently raised her face.

"Never mind what I understand. The question is: Do you understand me?"

Elsie looked at him with embarrassed eyes. "I hope so. I hope you're going to respect my wishes and act the part of a man."

"Oh!" He laughed. "That much I can promise you. I shall act the part of a man!"

CHAPTER XV

THE days following her afternoon with Renshaw, Elsie was more miserable than at almost any time since her changed life began. Resentful and impatient as she had been at the errors and entanglements that she had been forced to assume, heretofore through it all she had been upheld by the consciousness of actual righteousness and the instinctive assurance that because of it she would be led safely to a just and satisfactory outcome. So far nothing had been of her own doing; she had a right to demand that much. Now she had lost that consolation, that assurance, because of wrong-doing on her own part, actually of her own volition. And not only that. One lapse from the plain and appointed path could be forgiven to any one, if it were repented and the mind firmly set against a repetition. But Elsie could not be at all sure of that. At present she felt her only safety to be in hiding and seclusion, an unbroken maintenance of neither of which was practical or to be depended upon. And evidently so far she could not depend upon herself. She was a city divided against itself. In this particular connection she could not even make a resolution and keep it. When Renshaw called her up,

as he did each day, and she heard the peculiarly rich voice speaking so gently to her, she could not snub and rebuff him as she had been able to do before knowing him. What she supposed she should have done by the actual rights of the case, was to forbid him to use her telephone or to communicate with her with such regularity. But that seemed physically and morally impossible. For one thing, she was afraid of him, realizing full well now that she came to know him that he was not a man to take trifling treatment complaisantly. Sometimes, as it was, she felt that the unvarying refusals with which she met his invitations were taken with ominous good nature. However, she trusted to a gradual wearing out of his patience. It was the best she could do with herself — and him.

She worked almost furiously at her music, singing and playing — not desultory performance of either, but actual drill — for hours a day, and kept her housekeeping tabulated down to an exceedingly fine point. Still, she could not refuse, nor wear away, that restless, longing energy, that eager yearning — for something — that was almost a physical ache.

“Beginning to be about ready to give up?” inquired Addie one morning. She was on her favorite divan, nestled up into a delightful little bundle of silks and curls, and she looked across at her friend with roguish, yet withal speculative, eyes.

“I don’t know. What do you do when you want

to give up and there's nothing to give up to?" inquired Elsie.

"Dear me!" Addie apparently wrestled with the problem. "That's like the man who could n't stand up and could n't sit down. And history does n't record what compromise he finally hit upon, which is a pity. It might have helped us." Addie chatted blithely on; but her mind was by no means as vacant as her chatter. "I suppose before we can squarely and scientifically discuss the question we must ascertain what it is you want to give up."

"Oh — What does any one mean when he says he wants to give up? The whole problem of living, I suppose."

"That has a sort of suicidal sound," said Addie, speculatively. "Not contemplating suicide are you?"

Elsie laughed — a laugh whose ill nature was all for herself. "I don't know. Sometimes I think I should like to take this discontented old carcass down to the river and dump it in."

Addie elevated her eyebrows in mock surprise. "Well, now, I always thought that was a pretty nice carcass of yours."

"Humph!" said Elsie, by way of comment.

Addie kept her bright eyes, with their mingled amusement and discernment, on the face before her. She saw, as Renshaw had done, that singular, worn look which was so certain and yet whose outline or

abiding place could not be traced; and which was in such contradiction to the glowing vitality and superabundant health of the girl. But Addie was high-bred. She would not even look very long at a trouble that insisted on discovering itself without the owner's consent.

"How is the world, meaning you, using the redoubtable Annie nowadays?" she asked presently.

Elsie's face relaxed into an almost roguish smile. "Very badly, to judge by the expression of her face."

"You know, you must use a little judgment in manipulating matters and not overcrowd," advised Addie. "Or else temper will get the better of Annie's discretion and one of these fine mornings she will take up her trunk and walk."

"Well — she may," declared Elsie, entirely unimpressed with the possible catastrophe.

"Have you any one else in view?" inquired Addie.

"No. But I know that Annie is not the only maid in the city. Of course she's a good cook — oh, and a good worker, too. But there are compensations. And besides, she's odious to me now."

Again Addie speculated somewhat. "Well, if she should depart suddenly, call me up at once. I'll get Lottie to run over and tide you over the worst." Then, before Elsie could make any attempts at ex-

planations or thanks, "And now go and sing me that gypsy song. I just love it."

Elsie obeyed, tacitly accepting the ending for the time being of troublesome subjects.

One little reward came to Elsie as a result of her strenuous reformatory measures in the housekeeping line. That was at the beginning of the month, when the bills came in again. She took care to be present every morning until they had all arrived and watched Alan intently as he opened each one. In almost every instance he was plainly surprised and finally made frank comment on the improvement in the totals shown.

"You certainly managed to make your hints to Annie effective," he observed. "Already there's a marked difference between this month and last."

"Yes." Elsie smiled covertly as she reflected on the nature and constancy of the hints.

"Was it much trouble?" he inquired, turning his head and catching the fleeting smile.

"No more than I cared to take."

And Alan questioned no further. Elsie showed signs of becoming that rare thing, a laconic woman.

It was not very much trouble—or, as she had said, no more than she cared to take. It was ultimately productive of more trouble; but even so, again no more than Elsie was willing, even glad, to take. For, being informed one morning that a

pound of butter on two successive days was not to be henceforth any part of the Leland housekeeping plan, Annie let her temper suddenly get the better of her judgment, as predicted. She departed with much haste and more disdain, amazed even to the last at the inexplicable and horrible change that had come over her one-time complacent and highly desirable mistress, who now, by the way, received the announcement of her instant departure with astonishing equanimity, even to the extent of telephoning an express company to call for the trunk.

When Annie, having expressed her sinister intentions, had gathered up her aprons and such belongings as were about the kitchen and had gone upstairs to perform the supposedly ominous feat of packing her trunk, Elsie remained in the kitchen and took possession of this final and hitherto unattainable portion of her kingdom. Far from being overwhelmed with a sense of catastrophe or loss, of being afraid of what was ahead of her, she was secretly delighted. And when the door of the house closed finally on Annie and her trunk, Elsie was conscious of a strong feeling of relief. She rummaged and investigated in every cupboard, corner, and drawer of the kitchen and basement, familiarizing herself thoroughly with all resources and equipment. So much did she enjoy the new and total possession of her home that she could not bring herself to go down to the city

and seek another maid. She gave herself one whole day of complete possession.

The feeling of insecurity and unreality, of temporary residence only, that had been with Elsie during the first few weeks of her new life, had faded to an almost unbelievable extent. And now that Annie, the tangible and sinister reminder of those unknown former days and things, was gone, Elsie felt the love that had been growing up in her for her beautiful home — full of trial and anxiety as the terms of her possession were — take on a new quality. Now, but for that warning, haunting thought of Una Hamby forever in the background of her consciousness, it would really seem her home.

Far from calling up Addie in consternation, as she was supposed to do, Elsie set about her plans for dinner with almost girlish glee. There was the best part of a roast of beef and mayonnaise in the safe, and lettuce and asparagus were ordered. So Elsie took down one of three cook-books that stood on the kitchen shelf and cheerfully bestowed about an hour's study upon the subject of salads and desserts. She decided upon cup custards as being about the simplest dessert for a novice to experiment upon. She decided, too, to have baked potatoes with the cold roast beef and reflected economically that one oven would cook both potatoes and custard.

When the gas oven was lighted that afternoon and

the potatoes — brushed clean, according to instructions in the book — were placed therein, and the custards mixed and hopefully deposited on a lower plane, with the gas turned down for their benefit, also according to the book, Elsie discovered that time was fleeting. She set her table and then ran upstairs to dress. She put on the blue crêpe de chine as being probably less susceptible to kitchen influences than most of her other gowns. Going back into the kitchen, she needed an apron, but had never seen anything of the kind among her belongings. So, after the fashion of all women when confronted with that emergency, she selected the largest tea towel and pinned it about her.

CHAPTER XVI

NO young hostess, giving her first dinner of importance, ever viewed her table with more pride than did Elsie as she struck the gong for dinner that night. Alan looked faintly surprised on entering the room to see her already there and moving the salad dishes into more imposing positions. But it was not until she rose to fetch the forgotten butter that he made any comment.

"Is Annie out, then?"

"Yes," calmly, "for good."

Alan looked up in surprise. "Oh." And then, "Very sudden, is n't it?"

"Yes, and no."

"Meaning?"

"Why, the actual departure was sudden — yes," explained Elsie. "But, like everything else, a train led up to it."

"I see. The economy business, I suppose." Alan looked amused. "I thought the effect was too good for so short a time. I'm afraid you crowded the reform operations a little, did n't you?"

"I did n't try to reform her. I merely decided that certain abuses should cease, once for all," said Elsie, coolly. "I suspected from the first that she would go, once she realized that —"

"That you meant business," suggested Alan.

"Yes. And that I should n't relax vigilance. I did n't show any signs of improvement. In fact, I got worse. And so — I'm glad she's gone."

"When did she go?"

"This morning."

"Oh." Alan glanced round the table with renewed interest. "And so you got this meal yourself?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, I don't mind if I never have a worse," he commented.

When Elsie rose to bring on the dessert, Alan got up too and carried out the beef and some of the dishes; and when the meal was over he helped busily with the clearing of the table, apparently faintly amused at the whole proceeding.

Then he went to his books, but Elsie stayed in the kitchen. She washed the silver and piled the dinner dishes. And then, deciding that as the early mornings were still chilly she would get breakfast on the range, she examined the contents of the wood lift. Following the examination she went down into the basement and loaded the lift with kindling and fine wood, superimposed upon the heavier wood already contained. She was still busy and greatly interested in her new rôle, when Alan came down and found her.

"What are you doing?"

"Oh, just getting my wood ready for the morning."

"Well, leave it alone," looking at her in mingled surprise and amusement. "I'll see that the wood lift is filled before I go in the morning."

"Before you go?" echoed Elsie. "But how about breakfast?"

"Well, you can get up and get yours at your leisure. I'll get mine in town."

"Why?" demanded Elsie almost resentfully.

"Why — for convenience, of course. Don't you think I can accommodate myself to an emergency when necessary?"

"No doubt. But this is n't an emergency, that I can see," promptly. "If you can be content with coffee and toast and that sort of thing, it will be there to-morrow morning."

"Oh, all right." Alan's amusement seemed to increase. But he wound up the wood lift without any further comment.

Not trusting herself to awake in time in the morning, Elsie took up to her room the kitchen alarm clock and set it for half-past six. And what is more, when it rang she jumped out without a moment's compromise.

When shortly after seven Alan came into the kitchen, the range was roaring merrily, the kettle boiling, and Elsie was standing regarding with puzzled eyes the coffee percolator.

"What did you get up so early for?" inquired Alan. "I should have had the fire lighted in time."

"I wanted to have the fun of doing it myself," explained she. "Do you know how this thing works? It's beyond me at present."

Alan smiled, took the percolator, and made the coffee, while Elsie put the toaster on the stove and got out the egg-poacher.

"Let's have breakfast in the kitchen," said Alan, with a glance at the wall table near the window.

"Oh, yes!" Elsie hailed the idea with enthusiasm. "That'll be nice."

She brought in eggs, cut slices of bread for the toast, and then discovered the folding supports of the wall table, got it into position, and set it with china and silver.

The two ate a very comfortable breakfast together, and Elsie noted with strictly secret satisfaction that Alan did not hurry over it. Then he went to town, with a faint suspicion of amusement still in his eyes and lurking about the corners of his lips.

Like Annie, he attributed the great change in Elsie mostly to the accident. He divined that her somewhat perilous position had been shown her as in a flash. Time would dim the effect of the revelation and bring things back to something like the previous level, he supposed. Still, he had never dreamed that Elsie had it in her to show, even for a time, such

capability and backbone as she was showing meanwhile.

Elsie visited the best agency in the city in search of a maid, and as the conditions of the position she had to offer were all eminently satisfactory, she obtained easily a young and pleasant looking Danish woman. Having no other precedent, this woman, Ada by name, accepted Elsie's frequent presence in the kitchen as a matter of course; and from the first Elsie took into her own hands entirely all ordering of supplies and all dealings with tradespeople. Ada was not so good a cook as Annie, But Elsie was not only willing but glad to help with the cooking and menu problem. Each day she helped more or less with the cooking of the dinner; and as Ada was not so swift and vigorous a worker as Annie, she also took upon herself most of the dusting of the rooms.

And in connection with this new order of things Elsie discovered, too, a new weekly duty which Annie, doubtless from diplomatic reasons, had incorporated into her own routine. She opened and distributed the laundry and was reminded by that of the necessary overseeing of Alan's clothing. And one thing leading to another, she got the idea of going up to his room and ascertaining the exact state of his wardrobe. What she found made her ashamed and intensely disgusted with herself that she had not bethought herself of this duty before. Annie's

work, while perhaps answering the purpose for which it was executed, was extremely inartistic, from ill-matched buttons to coarse stitching and cobbled socks.

To her chagrin, on cutting out of a sock one of Annie's cobbly darns, Elsie found that her own, in spite of her best endeavors, was not such a very great improvement. However, she could soon learn to make a nice flat darn; she knew that. And in the meantime she labored and prepared to the best of her ability two pairs; the rest she took to his room for further efforts.

Elsie spent the best part of the day at this new work and did not realize how much she really enjoyed it, did not stop to note that this was the first day her mind had been busy in a contented way. She did admit to herself, though, that she liked to be in Alan's room; that to her it seemed to be full of the cool, magnetic personality of the man. She knew she liked touching the different articles because they were his and had come in close personal contact with him. Once she found herself laying her cheek against the wonderful glowing fabric of the Indian bathrobe. She smiled, half in pity for herself. She relined the drawers of the room and closet and took the hair-brushes out and washed them. And all this she did with the quiet satisfaction and inward tenderness of a woman ministering to the one she loves.

As the days went by, one thing became clear to

Elsie and she did not attempt to deceive herself on the point. The greatest hurt Una Hamby could do to her would be through Alan, because there she cared most. And the more she thought of it the more probable it seemed that here was just where Una could accomplish most — in fact, about the one and only field of operation in which she could work safely. Having a knowledge of that other woman's past, of which Elsie herself knew nothing, she doubtless had at her disposal many things which, if brought to Alan's knowledge, would be disastrous. If she had — and this seemed a certainty — she would most assuredly not fail to use her knowledge to the utmost of its vengeful possibility.

CHAPTER XVII

THINKING things over one afternoon, Elsie found herself wondering anxiously whether or not Una was out of the hospital yet. The question was forerunner to immediate action. She went to the telephone and called up the hospital. She was told to wait a minute while the clerk consulted her records and then was informed that Miss Hamby had been able to go to her home on the second of the month. The second — and this was the nineteenth. Over two weeks ago. Elsie wondered now if Una were well enough to be back at work. If she knew what office — When she had questioned him that time Willett had said a Calthorpe and his secretary. This Calthorpe must be a somebody to have a secretary. Probably the ever-useful telephone directory could help again, and she took it up at once. Calthorpe was easily found. "Calthorpe, Eugene R., Lake Shore & Eastern Railroad; Blain Bldg." Elsie's eyes widened. Why, that was Alan's company! She sat amazed. It had never occurred to her before even to wonder who Una's employer was; it seemed of little importance. Then she wondered what position Calthorpe held in the company. Some

position of importance, of course — with a secretary. She could soon discover from the directory. She looked up the L. S. & E., and saw that a private exchange connected all departments. She called the number and asked the operator a question.

“Is there a Calthorpe on the staff of the L. S. and E?”

“Do you mean President Calthorpe?” crisply.

“Oh, yes. Thank you.” Elsie hung up, then sat thinking and wondering again for a few minutes. Had anything been left out that could have made the discomfort and muddle more complete? It must have been additionally galling for Alan to have the president of his own company discover his wife in the company of another man. Of course, on the face of it, if Calthorpe knew or had heard of nothing previously, the mere fact that she was being driven home by a friend, even if a man, was not in itself remarkable. Well, anyway, there was no use in turning all that over and over again. She could only wonder and guess, and guessing got her nowhere. What she wished to know now was whether or not Una Hamby was back at her post. Her post — such a central, keynote position!

She called up the L. S. & E. again and asked for the president's office. It was given her, and a pleasant but businesslike woman's voice answered her.

“Is this President Calthorpe's secretary?” asked Elsie.

"Yes."

"Miss Hamby?"

"Oh, no," said the voice quickly. "Miss Hamby won't be back for a few weeks yet, possibly a month."

"Oh. Her shoulder — is it —?"

"Knitting very nicely. But fractions are slower to heal than breaks," detailed the voice after the pleasant but impartial manner of one trained to give information and information only. "If you wish to call up her home, her number is West six-o-three."

"Thank you." Elsie hung up with a grim smile. She had not the least desire to call up the home in question. Still, when she thought of Una, although it was with dread, it was not with any thought of hatred or even spite. Una was too desolate, too deprived. When Elsie thought of all the other girl faced, over and above what she herself had faced, her soul stood still with pity.

Three weeks — perhaps a month. Well, that much could be counted as safe time. Una would hardly begin any course of action while she was still at home.

As conversation became more extended between Elsie and Alan — always extremely cautious on Elsie's part — she came to know his favorite dishes, and tried and experimented with them until she could cook them almost as well as Annie had done. Whereupon they continued to appear on the table,

and Alan little guessed the time and trouble that sometimes had been expended upon them. He did observe for himself, however, that she had more to do with the household management than formerly. He noticed on Sundays, for one thing, that she almost invariably went into the kitchen before each meal. Moreover, he came home early one afternoon and, finding no one about, went into the kitchen and discovered her enveloped in an enormous apron, making mayonnaise. She turned and stared at him as he stood in the doorway.

"I've come to see if I can beg a cup of tea," he explained. "I've had a beastly headache all day."

"Oh! I'm sorry," she said quickly. "Go and lie down, won't you? And I'll make you some."

Ada offered to make the tea, but Elsie had no idea of foregoing that pleasure. She made the pot of tea herself and carried it into the living-room, where Alan had taken her advice and was stretched upon the lounge. He looked very tired, almost hollow-eyed. Elsie poured out a cup of strong tea and gave it to him.

"What part of your head aches?" she asked him.

"Over my eyes, and the temples."

"Hot cloths placed over the eyes give a lot of relief sometimes," she ventured.

"Yes?" He turned and looked quizzically at her. "How do you know, Elsie? I did n't know you had ever had a headache in your life."

Elsie ignored this. "Will you try the cloth if I bring one?" she inquired gravely.

"Yes, I'd be glad to."

She hastened willingly away and in a moment or two came back to the lounge with a steaming cloth clasped closely in her hands to keep in the heat. This she placed over the man's eyes and as it cooled off into mere warmth, Alan was surprised to find it quietly lifted and another take its place. The fifth cloth she allowed to remain over his eyes, wisely reflecting that the moisture itself would probably soothe and relax tired nerves. As it did, for Alan fell asleep.

It was after the usual dinner hour when he awoke. The pain in his head had ceased; so sweet was the relief and the sense of repose that he lay quiet for a few minutes, neither moving nor speaking. Elsie was sitting by the window. She had been reading, but the book now lay on her knees, her hands clasped lightly over it. The expression of her face was so greatly at variance with the woman he knew that Alan studied it in mingled surprise and curiosity. It was grave, and the lips, whose curves were naturally so sweet and alluring, held a faint little smile — an understanding, satiric smile, as of an old, disillusioned woman.

Alan wondered afresh at Elsie. Never had he known her to have a repentant spell which lasted for even a quarter the time of this one, nor which

changed her as this one had. What could actually be the cause of it? That there was a cause, which had nothing to do with himself or any words of his, he did not for a moment doubt. Neither did he doubt that the effect would eventually pass, as all the other moods of this strange woman had passed.

Still, when he remembered the usual program during a spell of repentance or discovery — usually synonymous — he was thankful. Formerly the short fit of sulks that met his displeasure had been quickly followed by a persistent demand for forgiveness and caresses, which had been to him disgusting and galling. Now he could almost admire her again. For at least she was not playing the hypocrite. So entirely platonic and businesslike in every particular was her manner in all the details of their daily intercourse, that his own could not more than match it.

One morning Elsie received two letters, one of which amazed, and both of which somewhat appalled her. One was from a Madame Bonshall, evidently her dressmaker, containing a statement of account, some of the items of which, Elsie noted, were over seven months old. The amount totaled two hundred and eighty dollars, and was accompanied by a polite request for a check. The other, from Paris, was a long, chatty epistle full of names of unknown people, and signed by her loving mother.

That she had a mother in Paris Elsie already knew

from the letters in the desk upstairs; and something of her she also knew, for both Alan and Addie had mentioned her now and again. From Addie especially, by dint of carefully conducted conversations, Elsie had ascertained with much relief that Mrs. Van Duyn, since her daughter's marriage, had become devoted to Parisian life; and that about three letters yearly were all she found time to write. Elsie also opined from what she could gather that Mrs. Van Duyn was an ultra stylish and very worldly woman, who had been both disappointed and disgusted with her only daughter's marriage. In connection with all this, Elsie had often congratulated herself that, seeing she had to be picked up and set down suddenly in the midst of strange scenes, she had been put in the place of one evidently having but a small personal following.

Barring this much-occupied and distant mother, there did not appear to be any very near relatives; and of close personal friends there seemed to be none at all with the exception of Addie. Of acquaintances, when abroad with Addie, Elsie found she had a goodly number. Still, none ever came to call at her home, even of those living in the neighborhood. And for this Elsie was convinced in her own mind that she was able to assign a reason.

At first she was inclined to be puzzled at the number of callers at Addie's home in contrast to the entire absence of callers at her own, seeing that Addie

lived, and as far as she could gather, always had lived, essentially in very similar manner to herself — or the one that had been herself. But in the eyes of the world the great difference between the two women was this — that Terry McKeene, when at home, was plainly in accord with his wife's life, attending anything and everything with her, and having just as gay a time on his own account as she had on hers; while Alan had not been seen in his wife's company for, as far as Elsie could judge, at least a year or more.

Of course Addie McKeene had money — a considerable amount, Elsie judged — and of her own; this might make some difference. But not all. Elsie had been able to sum up the situation pretty correctly. It was the sanction and countenance of the husband that decided matters. It was idiotic; in keeping with most of the judgments that the world made; and Elsie smiled to herself when she thought it over. But it did not trouble her at all. The absence of friends or callers was a distinct advantage in her eyes. So much less to cope with; that was all.

And incidentally, this was one of the things Elsie admired in Addie McKeene — one of the things that helped to form the real affection she was beginning to feel for that blithesome little lady. The esteem — or rather, lack of it — in which Elsie was evidently held made not a particle of difference to her friendship, which Elsie gathered was of lifelong duration.

From references made time and again by Addie Elsie could see that the two had been little children together, at school together, abroad together.

Elsie thought of Addie now, as she sat with the two letters on her lap. Presently she would go over and read her mother's letter to her. Probably from Addie's comments she would be able to glean much that would be useful in answering the letter. The dressmaker's note received more consideration. Elsie was very much disgusted and perturbed. She reflected disconsolately that, for all she knew, there might be outstanding accounts in other quarters. She sat and thought, idly scanning the itemized statement. Then a way presented itself. There were the garnet necklace, the diamond sunburst, and the beautiful diamond-and-pearl marquise which in fear and disgust she had locked away. They would solve the problem — of taking both themselves and the obnoxious account out of her existence. To-morrow she would take, say, the sunburst down to one of the big jewelers and sell it. She decided not to take all three pieces to any one jeweler. It might cause comment, even inquiry.

As she sat and thought of it, Elsie felt she intensely disliked this way of eliminating the unfortunate jewels. There was something mercenary and underbred about it. But still, what was she ever going to do with them? They had been accepted some time ago, doubtless, under circumstances and

conditions of which she knew nothing. To offer to return them now would be absurd — moreover, dangerous. And she doubted that the time would ever come when it would be safe to open up the past to that extent. And she did want them out of the house. She did not see how else she could pay this dreadful account, either. She wondered how that other woman had expected to do it. She thought very likely, however, by the way he kept the bank account so strictly in his own hands, that Alan had been confronted, perhaps periodically, with just such accumulations of debt as this.

Elsie sighed. Never, never in this world could she bring herself to confront him with such a list of extravagances as this statement presented. No, she would take the other way out of it. That was disagreeable, also, but the less disagreeable of the two.

That settled satisfactorily in her mind, she put on her hat and walked round to Addie's. If she should call her up, Addie would offer to send the electric for her. Never once had she mentioned the roadster since Elsie's refusal to use it. But Elsie had noticed that whenever Addie knew beforehand of her arrival, it would chance that Willett Renshaw would drive up in the midst of her visit. Elsie knew that a hint to Addie would doubtless end this series of coincidences; but on reflection she refrained. It was quite the safest way of meeting him, and to meet her somewhere every so often he was at present plainly

determined. She had attended various functions and performances with Addie, and at each he had joined them. But then, so had others. And as the box, or best position, or whatever it was that was necessary to the best enjoyment of the affair, had in each instance been provided by him, as Addie, too, had availed herself of these things, Elsie had decided that it would not be very noticeable, and that she had better make the best of it.

CHAPTER XVIII

ADDIE was playing and singing with much gusto when Elsie entered. She had a voice of no power and only very medium training; but she had a blithe, impish way of delivering the gay, swinging songs she always chose that was immensely taking. And according to that law of attraction of opposites, by which each admires and envies what he has not, Elsie longed to catch the inborn knack which Addie had of lilting out catchy and more-or-less popular songs. But her own big, vibrant voice, laden with the revelations which a restrained, passionate nature insisted on making, made that class of songs sound something like the gambols of an elephantine kitten, and robbed them of all charm. And fortunately Elsie was wise enough to recognize this, and stick, discontented or not, to the songs she could sing.

The two women chatted over their music, over new songs, and tried scraps of this and that. Then, when they tired and left the piano, Elsie produced the letter from her mother.

"Countess Rospigne." Addie reflected a moment. "Oh, yes — to be sure. That was that fat

Mrs. Erdman. You remember her." Elsie shook her head. "Oh, you do! why, of course you do! Big, fat blonde — widow of that wholesale clothing man. Used to do up her hair in such fearful and wonderful style. I knew she was getting ready to be a countess, or something like that." Addie gave one of her wicked little chuckles. "Maybe you don't just remember her marriage, although she bought up almost the whole of the society pages in the Sunday papers that week. But you know her — would if you saw her. Mrs. Van Duyn does n't say anything about the gentleman with the double-barreled name this time, does she? — What was his name? — who figured so much in the last letter."

"Can't remember," said Elsie, truthfully enough.

"Humph! Lot of good it does writing to you," commented Addie. "Do you suppose you can — go over and visit her?" referring to Mrs. Van Duyn's request to that effect.

"No, I don't want to," replied Elsie candidly.

"You don't!" Addie was plainly surprised. "Why, not so long ago you were crazy to. Are n't you going anywhere this summer?" Without waiting for Elsie's reply, she clasped her hands. "Oh, that reminds me. Terry will be in next week. Had a letter this morning. Then I can go —"

The ringing of the telephone bell cut short this speech, and Addie swished across the room in her light, dainty way. Evidently the communicant at

the other end of the wire had but a short request to make, for the conversation as far as Addie was concerned consisted of but four words, "Hello. Yes. All right."

"That was Willett," she observed, as she came back to her seat near Elsie. "And you need n't blame me. He calls up each day to know if you're here, or going to be."

Elsie made no reply. Addie continued impishly, "Strange what a little reluctance and indifference will do, is n't it?"

"Strange what it won't do, you mean," said Elsie, a trifle crossly.

"How do you mean?"

"Why, my reluctance, as you call it, is intended to have the exactly opposite effect to the one you have in mind."

Addie gazed at her friend a moment or so, and then pursed up her lips with a comical movement, either intended as indicative of her determination to mind her own business at any cost, or to keep back a too eloquent flow of opinion. "Well! Well, but—" recollecting, "you did n't answer my question. Are n't you going anywhere this summer?"

Elsie shook her head. "Don't think so."

"Well," desperately, "I can't see what you gain by that. Surely that's all right — to go for a vacation. Bother! I wish Alan had never finished that tunnel!"

"Why?" inquired Elsie curiously."

"Why, because he was away so much, of course, and we could do pretty much as we liked. I knew when he came back, and you had to begin that home-life business that Alan is so long on, that there would be trouble. You know," poutingly, "I'd planned to do so many delightful things after Terry has gone back. And I'm sure the Pennocks, and Clarence — and Willett, too — are just waiting till Terry's been in. They knew I would n't go out of town until he had. Then we'd all plan together. And now you'll go and spoil it all, you horrid little pig!"

Elsie laughed, and Addie smiled, too, despite her real disgust.

"Terry can only stay in a few days, or, at most a week, he says," went on Addie. "The water's so low they can work almost night and day. And he tells me to rest up, because he's certainly going to make things hum while he's here. So," concluded she, with an air of desperate determination, "I'm going to stay in every day this week."

"And this is only Friday. Good gracious!" commented Elsie.

Addie laughed; but her busy mind flitted instantly to other things. "You don't know any more about the franchise over Seventeenth Street, do you?"

Not knowing in the least what she was referring to, Elsie had but one answer to make. "No."

"I don't either. Don't see anything in the papers about it lately. But Terry will soon know all about it when he gets here. He's always on the inside of everything. I was going to say, I wish they'd hurry up and get it; then perhaps — Oh, but I don't suppose it would. Too close in."

"Well, I suppose you know what you're talking about," observed Elsie resignedly.

Addie laughed. "I was thinking that perhaps when they get the franchise it'll keep Alan busy again."

"But he is n't interfering with me," declared Elsie. "Honestly. He never says a word as to where I have or have not been."

"I believe it. That's easy," returned Addie. "You've never been anywhere nowadays."

Elsie's lips opened to reply, but she closed them again. It was true that she went out very little, but it was also true that this was of her own choice. It would, however, do no good to assert that. It would not be credited for a minute. So she did not say anything.

Shortly after this Willett drove up and Addie herself admitted him. He came in, big and smiling. "Hello, Addie." But his eyes traveled past her in search of Elsie.

He tossed his motor cap and gloves on a chair near the door and then walked over and kissed Elsie on the lips. When Addie poutingly held up her face,

he kissed her lightly on the forehead. "That's enough for little girls," he said teasingly.

He drew up a chair close to the two women and seated himself with an air of distinct satisfaction.

"Am I in on this?" he inquired, indicating by a wave of the hand the evident close conclave of the two.

"I don't believe any one's in. It seems to me we're all out," said Addie discontentedly. "Here am I ready to make all kinds of outing plans, only to find that Elsie is going to stay strictly 'ter hum.'"

Elsie smiled mischievously, like a naughty child who is publicly denounced and does n't care.

"Oh, well." Willett looked smilingly undisturbed also. "There's no telling what may happen before then."

Addie looked slightly puzzled, having counted on Willett as a strong ally in the furtherance of her summer plans.

Lottie came in with luncheon, which the three ate very informally and gaily, with what Addie called the lunch counter between them. They chatted as they lunched, or rather Addie and Renshaw did, while Elsie mostly looked on and laughed and listened. And long after Lottie had taken away the counter they still sat, contentedly talking, familiar and at ease.

Then the lively Addie was seized with a new notion. She commanded Elsie to play while she and

Renshaw practised a difficult step in one of the new dances. Elsie willingly obeyed, stumbling laughingly over the unfamiliar music, but managing to keep the required swing and rhythm even if at the expense of the melody. After both were tired they sat down again, but Elsie kept on playing for a while. Then she was brushed gaily off the piano bench by Addie, in order that the latter might play the very latest and most impudent rag-time song for Renshaw's edification.

Renshaw drew Elsie down upon the seat beside him and put his arm round her. Enraged at the beating of her heart, Elsie fidgeted in his clasp. But the arm that seemingly so lightly encircled her and clasped the hand on her lap, was not to be displaced by so much as an inch. The more she fidgeted the closer he drew her, and so finally she sat still.

Questioned by Renshaw as to this song and that, Addie sang about half a dozen before realizing that she was being manipulated. Then she jumped up.

"Well, if you think I'm going to keep on playing while you two —" She left one of her artistically unfinished sentences. "Now make Elsie sing."

"Oo, no. My stuff sounds horrid and dull after yours," protested Elsie. "Besides, I ate too much."

"No, you didn't. I watched you," returned Addie peremptorily. "Besides, what about me?"

"Well, you've danced yours all down," complained Elsie, as Willett led her gravely up to the

piano, seated her, and placed her hands in position on the keys. "Well, what is it to be?"

"Sing me the seaweed song," commanded Willett.

Elsie considered this indefinite description a moment. Then she sang that exquisite morsel, Brander's "A Sea Drift."

As the seaweed swims the sea,
In the ruin after storm.

Both of her listeners sat very quiet and watched her intently as she sang. Apparently she had forgotten their presence. For at least a full moment after she had stopped singing, the throb and beat of the music was in their ears. Addie moved uneasily and cast off the spell.

"Latache is certainly doing wonders for your voice," she said calmly. And then to Renshaw, "I've got to make a quick pilgrimage to town and back. Will you run me over?"

"I will," with mock condescension.

"Thought you were going to stay at home *all* this week," interposed Elsie.

"Well, so I am. You don't call that going out, do you?" demanded Addie. "I can't tell till I see it applied whether I'm going to like that spangled petticoat for the blue or not."

She ran upstairs to get ready. Renshaw crossed at once to Elsie and seated himself by her on the piano bench. He lifted her hands and kissed the

palms teasingly. Then, putting his arm round her shoulder, he drew her face to his, and with his lips against her cheek, called her all the sweet and endearing names that a man can think of for the woman he loves. And again Elsie was disgusted and amazed at herself, at her weakness. It was Alan's love she craved, Alan's only. She had divined and sensed the depth and power of his nature, she could imagine nothing sweeter than the companionship, as a loved equal, of that quiet, contained man. She would give anything and everything just once to see those cool, contemplative eyes rest on her face with the passion that lived in Willett's eyes as he looked at her now. Yet it seemed in some way that, just because she craved Alan's love so much, this other love soothed and comforted her. The touch of his flesh against hers, the firm pressure of his arms, quieted the ache that was in her. Yet afterward that ache came back intensified, on the principle of greater realization.

Terry McKeene came home. The day after he arrived he called up Elsie — who heard with much apprehension the voice of a strange man greeting her so familiarly — and demanded that she forthwith come over and visit him. Her guarded replies incensed him somewhat.

"Oh, come off the perch!" he exclaimed finally. "What the dickens do you think you're doing? Don't you know who this is?"

"I don't," confessed Elsie helplessly. For the

moment she had forgotten McKeene's pending arrival.

"Why — Well, I wish you were here! It's Terry, of course."

"Oh-h," vastly relieved. "How are you, Terry?"

"How are you, Terry?" he mimicked, exasperated. "I shall show you how Terry is, young woman. I'm going to send the wagon over, and Addie says come at once. We're going to have an early lunch."

So Elsie obediently entered the electric when it came, and went to meet this new and evidently familiar friend. She found a big, good-looking, sandy-haired, freckled-faced man, jolly and impudent, who unceremoniously grabbed and kissed her.

"Now stand off and let me look at you," he commanded. "Addie says you're a reformed woman, and I want to look at one. Don't know that I've ever seen such a thing before."

"Oh, Terry!" Addie wrinkled her brows deprecatingly. "I did n't say it that way; I said she was trying to be —"

"My goodness!" Elsie laughed. "That's a distinction with a horrible difference."

During luncheon Terry instructed Elsie to tell Alan that he was going to drop into the office for a chat, probably the next day. Elsie wanted both to come over to dinner, but Terry explained that in

view of his very curtailed leave of absence and the great amount to be done in so short a time, the invitation could not be accepted.

"In other words, nothing so mild as a mere invitation to dinner can be considered," supplemented Addie.

"Well! Now that is just exactly the size of it," agreed Terry, refusing to be apologetic. "And Elsie knows how it is. She has n't always been reformed."

"Now, Terry — don't tease," admonished his wife.

Two days later Elsie went with the McKeenes to the golf-club reception. And that was all she saw of the gay Terry. But after he had gone back to the project Addie called Elsie up one morning.

"Come over," she said. "I want to talk to you." And then when Elsie acquiesced, "I'll send the electric."

Cutting short the piano drill that she had become so interested in and had grown to like so much, Elsie went over to her friend's house. She found Addie curled up on the divan, eating her breakfast, like the dainty little sybarite she was.

"I'm late," she observed. "But I'm always frazzled for a week after Terry's been in. He goes like a whirlwind. Have a cup of chocolate with me?"

Elsie nodded as she accepted with a smile the com-

fortable upholstered chair that Lottie pulled forward for her.

Addie chatted inconsequentially until Lottie had finished waiting on them and had withdrawn; and then began, between interesting slices of toast, to approach the subject she had in mind when calling Elsie over.

"You know, Terry does n't think it's the least bit of good telling you. He did n't want me to. Tried to make me promise not to. But I would n't promise. I wanted to tell. He's very disgusted about it—worked himself all up over it. You know," with a thoughtful little smile, as if conveying some curious fact in natural history, "men are funny things. Though Terry does n't think as Alan does at all, still he admires him awfully. Says a man of Alan's makeup could n't think any other way—about what women should be allowed to do, and all that, you know. He says Alan's awfully clever, though—lots cleverer than he is. Says that tunnel is one of the finest pieces of work of that kind done in a long while."

Addie paused a moment, busy with her thoughts, while Elsie sat gazing at her, wondering whatever all this preamble might lead to.

"And he," selecting another piece of toast and presumably still referring to Terry, "thinks it's a horrid shame that Alan should n't be allowed to finish

the thing entirely and get the credit — having done all the hard work, you know. Of course, knowing so many of the boys connected with his line of work, Terry always gets on the inside of everything and,— But I should n't like it known where you got the information; it might do Terry some harm somewhere or other."

She looked up at Elsie and that despairing person shook her head hopelessly.

"Seeing you have n't told me anything and that I have n't the faintest idea in the world what you are driving at, I'm not very likely to disclose it."

Ignoring this reflection on her lucidity, Addie nibbled her toast for a moment in thoughtful silence. Then she stated in as matter-of-fact a tone as she could manage, "Terry heard that Alan is likely to lose his position with the L. S. and E."

Elsie's eyes opened wide. What new difficulties did that mean?

"Why?" she asked then, almost in a whisper.

"Well, you see, the L. S. and E. is going to use the South Bank people's terminals."

Elsie nodded, though she could not see what that had to do with Alan's position.

"And you know the L. S. and E. is coming in down Seventeenth Street, and has to electrify through the city," went on Addie. "And the South Bank people are going to have a man of their own

choice finish bringing the line in to the terminals. Or something like that. Probably won't sound anything like that, when they —"

"Well, but —" began Elsie, her brows wrinkling in her endeavor to grasp the situation. "I don't see — I should think a road could keep its own — what do you call it? — constructing engineer, even if it did use some other company's terminals. They pay for the use of the terminals, don't they? They must. Don't they often do that — I mean one line use another's entry into a town, and their yards, and all that?"

"Oh, of course, often," replied Addie. "They often arrange to run over one another's lines altogether."

"And do they always combine forces and have just one man to — to —" Elsie did not exactly know what.

"Oh, I don't think so," scornfully. "I think they keep their own men throughout. Oh, if you were to put this thing into so many plain words, it would look — well, what it is. But it 'll never be put into so many words. It 'll just be done."

"But —" Elsie was still entirely unenlightened. She saw there was something behind this matter and that Addie understood it and expected her to. But she did not. "I suppose I 'm awfully dense, but I don't see the point at all. Has some one — has Alan — an enemy on the road, then? — or what?"

"Well, I don't know about an enemy exactly," Addie laughed, and glanced, quizzically at her companion. "But there is some one who has, I suppose, decided that it would be more convenient to have him out of town nine or ten months of the year."

Elsie's eyes were still wide. "Would that drive him out of town?"

"Why, of course it would!" Addie looked almost incredulous at so much stupidity. "Positions like Alan's don't grow on the hedges. He'd probably have to go far afield to find another — of any importance, you know. Look at Terry. Has he ever been able to stay — to live — at home?"

Elsie's wide, puzzled eyes never left Addie's face. "Well, but — who —?" she began.

"Well, who — who?" mimicked Addie. "You little owl! Who is it that owns so many South Bank shares, and who, if he were offended, could pull strings on half the councilmen and prevent the L. S. and E. from getting its franchise down Seventeenth Street?"

The fact that she was confidently expected to know gave Elsie the needed clue. "You mean — Willett?" she asked.

"You are a great guesser!" Addie commended.

CHAPTER XIX

ELSIE sat still a moment, a slow, red flush of anger creeping over face and neck. Her heart swelled with pity for the man in danger of so much humiliation and wrong. "Well," she said then, and her words sounded hard and short. "I should n't have thought Willett would stoop to anything like that."

"Stoop? He won't have to stoop. He won't appear in the matter at all," returned Addie. "I suppose he's just dropped a hint to Reynolds, or some other of his henchmen; and it'll all be done so quietly that few will know it's done at all. No one will know why. Oh!" Addie gave a little cynical laugh, "that's nothing. Those things are done every day in politics and corporations, and so forth, especially if you get in the way of the Higher-Ups."

"Well," Elsie spoke slowly; "if so, if it's done, I hope I'll never have to speak to Willett again."

"And what reason would you give for such a line of conduct as that?" inquired Addie, almost coldly it seemed.

"I would n't give any." And then she added quickly. "Oh, I would n't betray the fact that I had any inside information, either."

Addie placed her chocolate-cup on her plate, and laid both on a near-by table. Then she leaned a little forward and rested her elbows on her knees. "Apart from that," she said, referring to the assurance just given, "have you ever stopped to consider how entirely and beautifully unreasonable you are?" She smiled engagingly as she spoke and the smile robbed the words of asperity. Still from behind that smile peeped out that sane and steady grasp of the fundamentals of a case which Willett Renshaw had once referred to as her good common sense. "Of course I don't exactly know what you and Willett have understood as regards each other, or — but I infer that you have n't precisely led him to suppose that your marital relations were one long dream of bliss." She looked at Elsie with gay, quizzical eyes.

Elsie smiled — slightly amused, too; only her amusement was of very different caliber from Addie's. "No, I suppose not."

"He knows," went on Addie, "you've told him, as you've told me, that you're just living with Alan on sufferance, as it were. You can hardly expect Willett to suppose that, in managing to deprive you of Alan's company, he is depriving you of anything you value; or that in depriving Alan of the opportunity to live in constant enjoyment of your presence, he is depriving him of anything very valuable in his scheme of things, either."

"Only the honor of name and family," ventured Elsie.

"Both of which have always been in your hands alone," returned Addie; "never in either Alan's or Willett's."

Not replying for the moment, yet not feeling the least resentment, Elsie looked curiously at Addie. Short as had really been her acquaintanceship with this woman, she had formed a sufficiently clear mental estimate of her to be astonished now at the cool, mature mind that rested behind the frivolous, pleasure-loving daily life. As a matter of fact, departing from her usual happy-go-lucky policy, Addie had set herself to present to her friend what she conceived to be the truth shorn of all sentiment concerning the new stand she was taking.

To whatever class an individual may belong, good or bad, grave or gay, there is in the accepted conditions and conduct of that class a certain code of honor, a straight line which, conformed to or not, is certainly existent, and by which each member of that class is judged. According to the voice of Addie's instincts now, Elsie was guilty of a sort of breach of faith, or of etiquette. At first, setting down the radical change in her friend to either the shock of the accident, or possibly Alan Leland's ultimatum concerning it, Addie had condoned Elsie's strange conduct with some sympathy and more amusement. But now that it bid fair to become a permanent state,

Addie considered it seriously according to her particular ways of judging. She felt that Elsie was acting very selfishly, to say the least of it, coolly upsetting, without the courtesy of explanation, reason or logic, and entirely without regard to the feelings of others, a state of affairs which she herself had been mainly instrumental in building up. She considered Alan's probable fate as purely and simply a result of Elsie's erratic conduct; and for this reason she had overruled her husband's greater discretion, and had insisted on telling Elsie of the matter. Moreover, faithful as Addie was in the main to her long friendship, disinterested and uninfluenced by the opinions of others, she was yet woman enough to decide that Elsie should not mentally take her martyr's stand in unalloyed comfort and sanctity.

Seeing that she knew only a part of what Addie judged as a whole, Elsie was not able to guess at the other's line of reasoning. That something had been reasoned out, and not altogether creditably to herself, she plainly perceived. But she was not even faintly resentful. Not knowing the truth of the case, her friend could not be expected to render a just judgment. When she spoke it was quite gently.

"Yes, I know I'm the one that's mostly to blame."

"Oh, well, I don't know about that," said Addie, hastening to be strictly just in the face of such unexpected meekness. "You're the cause of it all,

of course. But what I mean just now, kidlets, is this: You're not playing fair. There are always two sides to every case and we have to consider the other fellow's side a little bit, too. We can't just decide what we want in the matter and then feel that's all there is. It never works. Just now you're not being fair to Willett — or to any one. If, for any reason or other, you have decided to have done with him, tell him so and be through with it. You're just dilly-dallying; just being sweet enough to him to keep him — well, as he is. And then you're very indignant if he decides to act in a more clear-cut and businesslike manner than you are." Addie laughed indulgently as she ended. Her words were so straightforward as to be almost harsh, and harshness was entirely foreign to her nature.

"I'm afraid — to offend him; actually to antagonize him," said Elsie in self-defense and without stopping for a moment to consider how it might sound.

Addie did look faintly surprised. Coming from Elsie the words sounded foreign. "Well, I don't think you need to be," she said, almost amused. "I don't believe he'd hurt you — or try to."

Elsie smiled ruefully. She saw she was only making things — and impressions — worse. She leaned forward, and touched Addie lightly and affectionately on the knee.

"Addie, I don't blame you at all for thinking —

as you do. You could n't very well think anything else, only knowing as much as you do. Some day —" she smiled sadly. "You've been such a good friend — I know you have. You've stuck to me through thick and thin, through good repute and bad. And some day — it may be a long way off, but some day I'm going to tell you everything. I — can't now."

Addie gazed at her, quite evidently taken completely beyond any calculation she might have made as to the probable turn of events. "Well," she said then; "I've thought all along that there was something —" She leaned back on the divan again, with an air of ceasing to consider any further a hopeless proposition. "Anyway, I'm glad you know." She concluded, almost to herself, "I should n't have been content if you had n't. Forewarned is forearmed."

Elsie smiled, a faint, grave little smile. And then she sat, chin buried in hand, and tried to think a way out of this new tangle. Of the probable financial loss and discomfort entailed by Alan's dismissal from his post, she did not think for a minute; only of the man himself — of the injustice, the hurt. And yet she was glad to realize that there was that in him which lifted him above the power of men to humiliate. They could do him an injustice, could perhaps ruin him; but Alan was of those men who can not be humiliated.

"It seems to me," she said presently, looking up from a brown study, "that there ought to be something I could do. Can't you suggest anything, Addie? Some way that I could head Willett off, persuade him or — anything?"

"Oh! anything!" Addie laughed. "That's a big order. But I'm afraid it's too late. It's an accomplished fact — or as good as — or it would n't be known. Besides, how are you going to connect Willett with the affair? We know who is at the bottom of it, of course; but no one else does. And if it ever came to a discussion, even we should have to call it a mere surmise."

"Are n't there — would n't you think the officials of the company would object to a thing like this?" wondered Elsie. "They must know that Alan is an efficient man."

"They do, of course. But few will get what has really happened. One or two will grasp the fact that there is a personal element in the matter somewhere — either a pull for the other man or a push for Alan. They're used to that sort of thing. Besides, even if they knew all, they could n't offend Willett. He does n't own half the road, and a lot of the city, for nothing."

"Humph, he did n't earn it," observed Elsie, scornfully. She did not actually know whether he had or not, but she thought not and voiced her convictions without considering.

"No, his father did that," agreed Addie. "But Willett's no man's fool, though. He's a strong man on his own account. Don't you think so? He has a good time and lives every minute of his life, but he does n't forget to keep a firm hold on men and affairs, nevertheless. And he has a way all his own of managing things, as you know. That's why in this case — between you two," she laughed, "I've been confidently expecting something to develop suddenly somewhere. I knew he was taking it all too quietly."

Elsie nodded. And if she had known the man better, she, too, would have been able to judge that the calm was more threatening than any storm. All her refusals, and they had been many, to meet him alone anywhere or on any pretext had been taken good-naturedly, generally with a laugh and a kiss. In return for what she fondly thought to be consideration for her changed ideas, she had met him at Addie's, or at gatherings that she could attend with Addie, and where it was known he would be present. In this way she had thought to reduce by gentle and artistic degrees an obnoxious state of affairs to something like the normal and right. Yet after all her imagined cleverness, all she had really succeeded in doing was to deepen instead of lessen an already existing wrong.

"It's funny," she observed after a few minutes' silence. "They say right will prevail, but —"

"Yes," Addie laughed. "They also say that might is right."

"But that is often quoted the other way about, making 'right is might,'" said Elsie.

"Humph! Well?" Addie's short laugh was a whole volume of comment.

"It is, in the end; must be, surely," insisted Elsie; "else by this time there would be no worlds left."

Addie looked unusually amused. "Dear me! I don't imagine the actions of us midgets, good or bad, very seriously interfere with the march of the spheres."

Elsie did not press the matter further. Her ideas were getting clearer day by day — that is, she could grasp and hold them longer — but she did not as yet court an argument with any mind at all keen that was set in an estate of its own making. Instead, she reverted once more to the main discussion.

"How soon do you suppose Alan will know of — of this?" she queried.

"Oh, I suppose — pretty soon." Addie frowned. "Terry thought they'd probably offer him a month's salary instead of notice. They would n't want him to have a chance to talk it over much at the office. Terry thought there might be a slight chance; but they'll arrange all that. Terry did n't think Cal-

thorpe, the president, would like it at all if he understood — you know, much about it. But those who work with him will know him, and they 'll see that he does n't get the straight of it."

In Elsie's mind rose the image of the employer who had stayed late at the office and was driving his secretary home on that fateful evening which began the mystery. The memory of Mr. Calthorpe's face was vivid enough, but when she sought to go further than that, to bring back some memory of the personality associated with that face, she failed utterly, as she had failed to restore any of the details of the office and the Hamby home. Striving to supply the lack, Elsie felt herself drifting out again upon that shadowy ocean from which she kept herself only by concentrating upon the daily facts of Elsie Leland's life.

She looked a little wistfully at her friend, Mrs. McKeene.

"Is Mr. Calthorpe a nice man?" she queried.

"Well, you've seen him," said Addie; "must have, many a time."

"Oh, well — seeing!" a trifle impatiently. "What is he like in his life? I wonder. That's what counts. I thought perhaps Terry might have said."

"He said he was rather a peculiar man, but very straight," recollected Addie.

Elsie nodded, and then sat quiet, trying to think, to discuss with herself what this change meant, what it might bring about. It might mean — if Alan obtained a position somewhere at a distance, and they sold or rented the home — getting away from all that knew them, or of them. Oh, she would be glad! In that way it might be a blessing in disguise. Only, Alan would be so hurt, in the hardest way a man can be hurt. He had loved his work — she was sure of that — and he had worked hard and faithfully. Now it was all to seem of no particular worth or value in the eyes of men. That was what grieved Elsie in this matter; really, all that did grieve her.

“There is n’t actually anything to worry about,” observed Addie, breaking in on her thoughts. “Alan won’t be any time at all getting some other position. I’m sure of that. And there’s no use talking, Elsie; it’ll be lots more comfortable for both of you if Alan is away a good deal of the time. You know you can’t go on like this. I don’t know — it’s the funniest thing.” She shook her head with an air of hopeless puzzling. “You’re simply not the same person at all since that foolish accident. Your looks and your voice are the same, of course, but — oh, and sometimes I even think your looks are changing,” plaintively. “You seem to fill out your gowns as well as ever, but — you’re getting a sort of worn-to-an-edge, transparent look.”

"Oh, dear me! I hope to goodness I don't get transparent," exclaimed Elsie, hastening to change so uncomfortable a train of thought. "I'm sure I don't know where I should end up in that case."

CHAPTER XX

IT seemed to Elsie, as she sat at dinner that night, that Alan was particularly pleasant to her. Or it might be that the reproachful spirit in her made her unusually sensitive. He had never shown the least disposition to sulk or to snub her; but of late their conversations had grown more lengthy and — to Elsie, at least — more and more interesting and enjoyable. Two reasons contributed to this result — Elsie's gradually increasing confidence and power to express herself, and Alan's observance and appreciation of the stand she was making in the way of improving conditions in the home. Of her attempts at improvements along other lines he could not judge, although the fact that she was almost invariably at home for dinner and in the evenings gave indications. Of home changes, however, he had plain proofs, if only in the greatly reduced expense sheet. He saw that in Ada she had less efficient help and that she cheerfully made up with her own labors what Ada fell short of accomplishing.

"She does n't do as well as Annie, does she?" he inquired one day.

"She does n't do as much, of course," replied

Elsie. "That was n't to be expected. She does n't demand the same wages. But she's amiable and obliging. And what she can't do, I can."

And she did. In place of the helpless woman dependent on Annie there appeared one who very plainly stood at the helm of things. Of the motive that was actuating her, of the reason for the tremendous change in her—a greater change than Alan would have thought possible for any human being, let alone an emotional woman, to make in so short a time—he did not attempt to guess. He would not even speculate. It may be that he was somewhat ungenerous, or that many and repeated disappointments had rendered him cynical and unbelieving; but he never for a moment supposed that she was pursuing this good course for the sake of its good. She had a motive, which time would undoubtedly disclose. Meanwhile, he did admire the strong and consistent effort she had been able to make. That alone had been a pleasant revelation. There was hope for anything but weakness.

To-night, as they sat at dinner, the evening breeze coming in sweet breaths through the wide-open windows, the setting sun flooding the walls with mellowing, golden light, it came over Elsie what a pleasant, peaceful home this was. How happy they might have been if—oh, if—if what?

Old man Lee, the gardener, was scuffling round, gathering up his gardening tools, and Elsie surveyed

him also with reflective eyes. "Lee's a very good gardener —" she observed.

"Yes. But what is the reservation?" inquired Alan, quick to catch the trailing, unfinished sound of the sentence.

"Nothing, as regards that statement," smiling. "But I'm a trifle disappointed in him for one reason."

"Yes?"

"Yes. He refused to contribute to an ideal of mine. I asked him if he loved flowers, and he said he liked to see them come up good and strong — yes. I told him he ought to love them, because it was his faith in them, when he put the seeds in the ground, that made them come up. And he said that was queer. Because very often they did n't come up, and then again very often they were not what he expected at all."

Alan laughed. "Very inconsiderate of him, I'm sure."

"Is n't it? And he's harsh and sinister in his handling of things, somehow. At least he gives that impression. I wonder how it is," reflectively, "that cripples are so often bitter. Is it because the spirit can't express through the faulty, half-conditioned body, or — You know, some believe the spirit shapes the body. I mean that the body is a sort of materialized shadow of the real individual. But there could n't be crooked spirits, could there?"

Alan shook his head smilingly. "I'm afraid I'm not enough of a metaphysician — But — no, I should n't think there 'd be either crooked or straight with spirit. One can't associate the idea of line or measurement, or anything to do with dimension, with spirit. I have n't thought the matter over much, though I have often looked at cripples and wondered. I believe I've always had a sort of idea that a spirit imprisoned in an ill-conditioned body has some penance to perform or lesson to work out. But " — he glanced at her in mingled curiosity and amusement — "when did you dive into metaphysics?"

"Oh, I have n't," disavowed Elsie. "If I did I'd never come up again. But these things present themselves and one has to wonder."

After they had risen from the table Alan went into the morning-room and stood in the French window to smoke his after-dinner cigar, as was his habit. Elsie stayed in the dining-room and gave her flowers fresh water; and as she did so the brooding, troubled thought came back into her face. Alan's magnetism was strong upon her, and so soothing and satisfying was it to her that in his presence she forgot her troubles. Now they came trooping back. This pleasant camaraderie that was growing up between them would soon be stopped. She wondered if Alan would ever discover the agency working against him. It seemed to Elsie as she

moved restlessly about that she simply must do something. She could not see upon reflection what good Addie thought to accomplish by telling her, if she were not to be allowed to use the information; or, at all events, not in the most important quarters. If she could not go to Willett, whom could she go to, unless it might be the president? Elsie did not see how she could very well go to him. Yet it would be a very great satisfaction to know that the men for whom, and with whom, Alan had worked understood the cause of his elimination from the service. That alone would rob the thing of nearly all its sting.

So fretted and tired did Elsie become from the fretting and yeasting of her mind that, forgetting for once Alan's presence somewhere in the domain, she sat down at the piano. She played a fairly easy but soothing, winding Bach prelude; and then sang the plaintive "Waters of Minnetonka." As she finished the last, grateful for the peace that the music brought her, Alan came into the room and seated himself comfortably in the window-seat, near the archway at the far end of the room.

"Go on," he commanded, leaning his head back, and looking across at her curiously. "Your voice is broadening out considerably lately. You've been doing a lot of practising, have n't you?"

Elsie nodded absently. "Yes."

"I notice a change in the music on your piano,"

went on Alan. "You're not singing so much of that light, trashy stuff as you used to."

"Oh! one always has to be able to sing that," said Elsie non-committally. "It's what you are always asked for and what always takes. But I never liked it for myself. This is what I always play by choice."

Alan looked incredulous. "Well, you certainly never divulged your real tastes before, then."

"Divulged," Elsie smiled, playing in a lazy way portions of the accompaniment before her. "That sounds so funny. I don't know that you ever tried to discover my tastes in this or any other direction, did you?"

This was a silly thing to say — especially to the man before her, who saw most things — and Elsie knew it. But she was in the mood to say biting things, even if at the same time they had to be silly.

Alan smiled in reminiscent amusement. "I don't suppose I did do any Sherlock Holmes business in that line. When two people live together their individual tastes become apparent to each other, I should suppose."

"Yes?" Elsie's tone was politely unimpressed.

"Yes. Don't you think so?"

"No."

"No?" Alan laughed. "Why, you know my tastes in most things, don't you?"

"I know most of your favorite dishes," said Elsie, with an air of careful thought. "I know by observation your favorite color in ties and your favorite mode of dress. I know by looking in the bookcase what books you choose to read." She considered a moment longer. "I really think that's about all. And you don't even know that much about me."

Alan threw his head back on the upholstered window-seat and laughed. "Well, what amazingly contained and concealed beings we must have been! But how about it? Why is this scant fund of knowledge confined to you? Can I not at least know as much about you as you do about me? Can I not also look in the bookcase to see what books you read?"

"Yes. But the result would n't be so final," answered Elsie, unconcernedly. "A woman's life is n't divided up into so many portions and pigeon-holed, like a man's. She takes from anything she comes in contact with. For instance, I read as much out of your bookcase as out of mine — more."

Alan was still smiling. "How long have you been doing that?"

"As long as I've been here."

"The dickens you have!" scoffed Alan good-naturedly. "Do you forget how many, many times you've told me that you did n't see how I could read the stuff I did — that it was converting me from a man into an icicle?"

Elsie smiled, taking due note of this glimpse into past relationships. "I may have. But I read them, just the same. I don't mind confessing that at first it was just words I read — dry and meaningless to me; that it was hard work, and that I had to make myself read. But I knew that in time, if I persisted, the spirit behind the words would stand forth, or that I'd get behind the words to it — whichever way you like to put it."

Alan stared across at her. So long and entirely puzzled and incredulous was his stare that presently Elsie took official note.

"Of course I don't like to be rude. But really, if you stare much longer, I shall have to laugh right out in meeting."

Alan laughed, himself. "Well, I couldn't decide whether or not you were — to use a slang but very expressive phrase — putting one over on me. You know it would n't be the first time. There's no mistaking your gift of mimicry."

"I don't feel the least bit of a gift that way," declared Elsie, truthfully enough.

"No, it's spontaneous," said Alan.

Being unable to guess what experiences along this line her predecessor had treated him to, Elsie was silent. But she sighed, a little, weary, discontented sigh. Would she ever be able to emerge chrysalis-like, from the shell of that other woman's personality?

She shuffled the music irritably along the piano. There passed the beautiful Elijah aria, which Latache was preparing her to sing in the big choir of which he was the director. She did not sing it now, but played it in a wistful, preoccupied way.

“And He shall give thee thine heart's desire.”

The heart's desire — high and noble desires, surely — not foolish little human desires. The hunger of a woman for the love and dear companionship of one man — would he also grant that? Strange thing, this soul of woman. Here was she herself, led through such experiences as she could not have come through alone, catching visions of such vastness of life around and before as should have lifted her to rapt, transcendent states. And instead, she turned coolly away and her heart made its demand with age-long assurance: “Give me this man to love.”

CHAPTER XXI

ELSIE awoke the next morning with a sense of burden. She went down to breakfast with a grave, preoccupied face. After Alan had gone she dusted the dining- and living-rooms, with the same feeling — that of dallying with an issue. She knew she had to take this impending, intangible and perhaps altogether fictitious trouble and sit down with it, and talk it over with herself, and decide once for all whether she ought to try to do anything with it. She did not see what she could do; it seemed in a way preposterous to think of trying to meddle in the matter. At the same time she could not let it alone. She went out into the garden and crossed verbal swords with the prosaic Lee, and thither, also, went the patient issue. Elsie reflected, almost petulantly, that life was a horribly uncompromising thing. It would not brook the least neglect of any of the tests it presented. In fact, there was no such thing as neglecting them. They merely waited. And it occurred to Elsie that most failures consisted of this — a putting aside, from disinclination or fear, of things to be faced, until the total was too great to be met.

When the telephone bell rang she went back into

the house, rejoicing at the prospect of a possible break in her mood. It would be either Addie or Willett, she knew. It was Willett.

"Top o' the morning!" he greeted her cheerily.

"Thank you. But I feel at the bottom of it," she responded.

"Yes? How is that?"

"Oh, on the precipitation principle, I suppose."

"Heavy-hearted?" he queried.

"N-no. Jes' a wonderin' what it's all about, anyhow."

"Don't wonder," advised Willett, "let things slide."

"Humph! They mostly do, whether I let them or not," declared Elsie almost resentfully.

"Well, go with them with a whoop and hurrah," instructed Willett. "That used to be you, all over. And you got along all right, did n't you?"

"Yes, so far," Elsie laughed. "But you know there's always an end to even the longest slide and sometimes there's a horrible bump at the bottom."

"Bumps are good for one," said Willett, laughingly. "All slide and no bump would n't be any sport at all."

"Humph!" observed Elsie dubiously. "Is this advice given from personal experience?"

"No, it is n't," confessed Willett with prompt good humor. "But the principle remains. A few bumps would be good for me."

"Sometimes," said Elsie, in a voice of ominous prophecy, "the bumps come all in a bunch at the end of the performance."

"Let 'em," scoffed Willett. "I shall be ready for them."

Elsie reflected, as she sat and listened to his words, how much less than useless it would be to approach him on the subject of Addie's disclosure, even if she were free to do so — which she was not. He would guess at once from what source her information came; and he was too powerful a man, too much in touch with councilmen and senators and politicians, men controlling valuable positions such as Terry McKeene's, for Addie to wish even to seem to be in league against him. In any case it would do no good. If he had really made up his mind to any such move as Terry's information credited him with, he would simply laugh the whole thing off the board to her, and go calmly on with it.

After their light, bantering conversation, which apparently meant so little but which Elsie felt covered so much, was over and he had bidden her a knightly and affectionate adieu, Elsie still sat at the telephone stand, nursing her face in her cupped hands.

The bright morning light came in waves of soft green through the vine-covered glass of the sun-room; the fountain bubbled and trickled in soft, soothing monotony. It was a dear and pleasant

home. If Alan had to go afield for another position, she would probably have to leave it. But in view of the greater gain she would not mind that. She would go with him gladly.

No, it was not the possible loss of his position that hurt her as regarded Alan. What did hurt her — hurt her tenderness for the man she loved, her quick pride in him — was the fact that he would seem to be so easily dispensed with as a man of no especial value or worth. If only men, the big men of the company, could understand why he went, and by whose agency, she felt that she could be fairly content. And that brought her back to the idea of going to the president, Calthorpe, an idea which had come into her mind even as Addie had been speaking of the matter. And several times since. Well, why not go to him? Whatever he did or did not do, he would know and understand. That was the main thing. It was an unusual, almost a risky, thing to think of doing. He would probably not wish to listen to her on the subject. But if she could get enough into even the first few words — say, before he divined her intention — so that he would know, that was all she would care about — just so that he knew.

While she still sat the door-bell rang, and Ada came and admitted some one. Elsie rose and went into the living-room, finding, to her surprise, Addie

coming across the floor to meet her. She was fully dressed for the street.

"Going or coming?" inquired Elsie, quizzically.

"Coming," almost hurriedly. "Had a letter from Terry this morning. The latest thing in footwear for his business is silk inside wool, and so he wanted a supply of silk socks sent at once — within five minutes after the receipt of the letter. No," shaking her head as Elsie pulled a chair up for her, "can't stay a minute. I'm late as it is. And the Ulmeisters are coming for luncheon."

Elsie looked at her keenly. She must surely be imagining it, but she could almost think that Addie looked flustered.

"And so I went down at once and sent off the socks," went on Addie. "And — Now, Elsie, for goodness' sake don't ever let Alan know that I was busy enough to rush right home to tell you this. It is n't that. But — I just know it's to do with you. And you must know where you're going, as far as possible. If it were a case of coming to tell a woman that I had seen her husband talking to another woman —" Addie tossed her head in refutation of the possibility of such a thing.

Elsie stood and gazed at her, waiting. She knew enough by this time of Addie's way of getting to a subject not to question or even try to guess.

"I took the street car to town," went on Addie.

"Jim had the electric down at the battery man's. When I was ready to come home, and waiting on the corner by the International for my car, whom should I see a few feet in front of me but Alan, talking to a young woman. I wouldn't have thought anything much of that, only the girl looked — oh, excited almost. And Alan was talking very seriously to her. A street car came along and as a truck was standing near the curb I had to step a little nearer to them to see if it were my car, and I heard Alan say, 'But I thank you just the same for telling me these things, although I can't bring myself to believe them.' It was n't my car, so I stepped back. It was her car, though, and Alan put her on it. Then he saw me and came up and asked me if I were waiting for a car. I told him yes. And then, because I don't often get a chance to tease him about another woman, I said, 'I'd ask you to hurry it up, but from what I see I don't believe you're a very sympathetic squire of dames in distress.' He knew what I meant and looked almost disgusted. He said, 'That's Miss Hamby — President Calthorpe's secretary. Railroad business only, you see.' But he *was* troubled." Addie looked at Elsie with inquiring eyes. "Don't you think she had been telling him — I don't know — I have a feeling she —"

Elsie looked at her with eyes fairly set in a wide stare. Then she laughed, a reckless laugh, full of a sort of defiant despair.

"Let the deluge come. It's better than waiting for it. The stage is all set for the last scene in the mellow-drama." She stretched out her arm with a mock melodramatic gesture. "The tornado coming down the valley, the vilyun creeping up the winding path toward the lonely cabin where the helpless maiden is — Is n't it funny, Addie?"

She laughed again. But Addie was rather shocked. She had been about to say more, but at Elsie's outburst her attitude changed.

"Now, kidlets, *dear!*" she expostulated. "Don't get excited."

"Oh, I won't," declared Elsie. "Don't you know that too much is a sedative?"

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN Addie left her and hurried home, Elsie found only one clear thought left in her mind. The idea of going to see President Calthorpe had strengthened somehow into a determination. She wished to do it, and do it at once. She wished to set her house straight while yet it stood up about her. And that was the only thing she could see to do. She would do it. And after that —

Though she did not realize it, she was in a state of suppressed excitement that keyed her up to above normal. But she went about the fulfilment of her plans in a careful, orderly way. First of all it occurred to her that Miss Hamby must be back at her post. If so — she did not know — what could Una do to her, anyway, more than she, herself, had done, and would do?

Elsie ate a very light lunch — hardly did more than drink the cup of chocolate that Ada brought her — and then went upstairs and dressed with much care and consideration for the city.

The doing of the nearest duty carries with it a very soothing effect. Or else youth and health are incurably optimistic. Or perhaps both. At all

events, as she rode down to the city, Elsie even began to hope again. Perhaps Alan would not believe Una's tale. How could he? Who would? And if only he would leave town and take her with him, all might yet be well. She would show him by her life and service that, whatever he thought of her past, she was now a woman worthy of respect. All her hopes came to be hinged on that — Alan's leaving town and taking her with him.

Very busily, but not at all fearfully, Elsie rehearsed to herself the exact words in which she would state her errand to the president, should she succeed in seeing him. Her main anxiety was to make her statement as brief as possible, compatible with covering all the information necessary. For two reasons — on account of a business man's supposed contempt for even one superfluous word and because she wished all possible facts uttered before any interruption could occur.

So intent was Elsie on her errand and the right and successful conduct of it, that it never occurred to her, as she stepped out of the elevator of the second floor of the Blain Building, and entered the L. S. & E. offices, that any one besides Miss Hamby would be at all likely to know her even by sight. So she was oblivious to the quick stare with which the office boy who took her card favored her. When the boy came back and informed her that the president would see her, she followed him through a long

room, with many desks. As they approached a heavy one-paneled door at the far end of this room, the door opened and Una Hamby stepped out. As Elsie passed her, their eyes met, for the first time since that good-by at St. Stephen's Hospital. In those black-lashed gray eyes still flamed resentment and hostility and it seemed to Elsie that they flashed a message in which threat of attack was strengthened by confidence of success. But in that moment Elsie passed the threshold of the president's office and the boy had closed the heavy door gently behind her.

She looked across a big flat mahogany desk at a man who had risen from a revolving chair, to the stranger whom she must know so well. Calthorpe was not a large man — of about average height and breadth — but he gave the idea of being closely and firmly knit, both mentally and physically. He was a man past fifty and his face spoke of a clean, concentrated life. The glance from the gray-green eyes was so reposeful, almost casual, that men were likely to underestimate the searching qualities of it. President Calthorpe had come up all the way from magazine-and-candy boy. He had educated himself. But greater by far than the education he had given himself was the wisdom the world of men had given him as he passed among them. So susceptible was he to shades of human character, so intuitive and instinctive a judge, that the study of it

was a daily fascination to him. Almost any one, with half an excuse for doing so, could come into his presence, and leaving, generally left behind him more than he dreamed. And so, because of the value he placed on the human unit, more than and apart from the fact that she was the wife of one of his favorite employees, Calthorpe looked with keen, quiet interest at the woman before him, and looking, felt his interest grow. So alive! She was as clear and unobstructed a vehicle or channel for the life force as the electric filament above him was for the illuminating current. It almost seemed to shine through the fineness of her, and the sensitive, receptive spirit of the man warmed at the life glow.

He had seen her before, but very casually. He remembered that she had been a participant in the accident; but as Renshaw had hurried her home, and as he had been so occupied at the time with his own share of the affair, and as Alan had calmly assured him the following morning that she had come out of it absolutely unharmed, he had thought little more of it. Since his wife's death, Calthorpe had lived almost exclusively in a world of men — men of affairs, too busy to be interested in gossip. And so, having heard nothing previously, Calthorpe attached very little importance or significance to the fact that Alan's wife was with Renshaw at the time of the accident.

So eager was Elsie to take the measure of the

man she was to speak to, that she was perfectly unconscious of the steady, grave stare exchanged between them. Calthorpe was the first to return to formalities. He bowed smilingly, and coming round his desk drew a chair forward for her.

"How do you do, Mrs. Leland? Won't you sit down?"

Elsie smiled and sat down. But her gaze returned immediately to the man who took a seat near her, and she prepared to begin her errand at once, without giving her intent any chance to weaken.

"I have n't taken precedent or convention very much into consideration in coming here, Mr. Calthorpe, and so I won't stop to consider them now," she began, speaking rapidly but clearly. "It's just something I want to do to ease my mind. If the information I have is correct, the fact that you'll know what I shall have told you will be sufficient. If it is not correct, will you please forget that I came?"

Calthorpe made no reply. She did not seem to expect it. He kept curious eyes on her face; but she, as soon as she began to speak, looked over and beyond, as if addressing an audience.

"I am told that my husband, your constructing engineer, is about to be discharged — no, dispensed with is better. That does n't matter very much, as long as you understand why. So please let me ex-

plain. I was an only girl, brought up to think fine clothes and pleasure the two main things in life. I married a man who could n't give me, perhaps, quite all I had been accustomed to in those lines. He gave me what was of far greater value, of course; but I had n't sense enough to see that. I was determined to get all I wanted; and so I cultivated friends who had the things I craved. Among these was Willett Renshaw. He had everything that money could get. A few months ago I — something happened to show me just where I stood. I turned over another leaf — tried to. Among my friends the belief is firm and unalterable that fear of Alan, and some threat of his, has produced the change in me. It has not. To save me from myself as far as possible, he gave me the protection of his home and name after he knew I had ceased to be worthy of it. To remove this unwelcome, restraining influence, Alan is to be forced to seek work at a distance. At least, so I am told."

She rose. "That's all I wanted to do — to let you know why he goes, if he does go, because you would hardly learn it otherwise. That's only fair to him, to the quality of work he has done, and to the love he has put into it. All I want," she repeated, "all I want — to ask of you is, that when he goes you will somehow let him know that you know. Not how you know — Oh, you will know how to do

it, impossible as it may seem to do! Just so it won't look as if he were of no particular value, to be easily spared any minute."

She smiled at the still silent and curious president — a quaint half-roguish smile. "And now I'm glad I've done it. When I go home and think it over, it will look childish and absurd and awful. That's why it's often a good plan to do a thing first and think it over after. Else it'll begin to look unnatural — like a word when we look at it."

She turned to the door and Calthorpe rose. He was too good a business man to commit himself in any way in a matter like this. And this was plainly an emotional woman, even if a brave one. But because he understood a very great deal, and also because he was after all a man, he smiled down into the wide eyes that spoke to him so eagerly. "I am very glad you came to see me."

He opened the door for her, Elsie smiled up at him and then passed quickly out. So full was her mind of what she had just done, that even Una Hamby was not in her thoughts and she walked down the long room seeing nothing. Thus she did not notice Alan at the far end of it, busily turning over papers in a desk. But he lifted his head and gazed in amazement at the woman who came out of the president's room and walked quickly and thoughtfully down the office and out.

So completely had Elsie been possessed by the

idea of what she meant to do and by the necessity of doing it at once, that the possibility of running into Alan at the office had never even occurred to her, and did not now. In fact, she always thought of him as somewhere on the line. So she went out to the elevator, was carried down to the main floor, and stepped out, still totally engrossed with her affairs. There a hand was slipped firmly but caressingly under her elbow, and startled suddenly out of her dreaming into recognition of her surroundings, she looked up into the smiling, amused eyes of Willet Renshaw.

"Such a preoccupied little lady!" he observed, still keeping the light, guiding hand on her arm, and turning to walk by her side down the big lobby of the building. "I was passing and saw you enter the building, so I jumped out of the car and waited. Why did n't you tell me you were coming down this afternoon, you little wretch? And where are you going now?"

Already Elsie was turning over in her mind how best to escape. "Oh, I've just a little shopping to do, Willett—"

"Well, I'll take you and set you down wherever you want to begin the giddy round," decided Renshaw easily.

They had reached the big revolving doors and Renshaw put out his hand to arrest their movement. A man who had stepped out of one of the elevators

almost immediately after Elsie, waited also, and as he did so lifted his hat. Renshaw did the same, his smile still unchanged; and Elsie glanced up. And then her knees suddenly weakened; and it seemed as if men, doors, and building were reduced to a blur. It was Alan. And she felt, rather than saw, the cool, unconcerned gaze that took them both in.

Somehow she got into the revolving door, followed closely by Renshaw, and stepped out upon the sidewalk. Renshaw stayed by her side, but Alan walked in a calm, businesslike way up the street, and was lost in a moment among the people.

Elsie gave a long sigh, like a woman waking from a swoon, and turned away. She was sick at heart and hardly knew what she did. But Renshaw took her arm authoritatively and turned her to the big car that stood at the curb. He looked at her with startled concern. She was ghastly white.

"Elsie, for heaven's sake — what 's the matter?" he demanded in a low tone. "Any one would think you were a fugitive from some harem. Alan can't tie you in a sack and throw you into the river, you know. Wake up."

Elsie felt like putting both hands over her face and sinking upon the sidewalk. And yet she wished to strike furiously at the man at her side. With it all she felt weak and cold and ill.

"Please let me go!" she said with sick fretfulness. "I'm going home. I don't feel well."

But Renshaw answered her almost roughly. "No. You're in no condition to take yourself home. Jump in. I'll take you home myself."

He had the door of the car open and his hand was on her arm to help her in. To resist would be to cause a scene perhaps. So she got in and sank wearily into the deep buff cushions. And so she remained as he drove along, hands folded limply on her lap and eyes staring hopelessly before her, hardly noticing, and hardly caring to notice, that he did really drive her straight home.

Arrived at Schuyler Street, he helped her out, and then in silence entered the house with her. But when the somewhat curious Ada had returned to the kitchen, he turned almost harshly on her.

"Sit here," drawing a big leather chair toward her. "You don't look as if you could stand much longer. For the Lord's sake, what does all this tragedy business mean?"

Elsie did not even look up. She laid her head back on the leather in a tired, hopeless way. "It means that you're trying to ruin my life. And I suppose you'll succeed."

"Ruin your life!" He laughed contemptuously, exasperated out of his usual gentleness. "What nonsense you talk! For stopping to talk to you in the lobby of a public building? Is that the kind of tyrant you have to live with?"

She smiled faintly. It was so useless to talk.

"There's got to be an end to this wordless nonsense between us," Renshaw went on, both anger and determination in his voice. "So now, tell me what the trouble is. Then we can both face it and see what is best to be done. What does all this mean?"

Elsie laughed — a bitter, reckless, twisted sort of laugh. "I don't know. I wish I did. I suppose it's all very amusing to — to some one."

Her bitterness was so quiet, so intense, that Renshaw was startled out of his anger. He was a big man, and not bad-hearted. He looked at the slender figure with the set, white face, and decided that now was no time to make her talk. Besides, talking was useless, after all. He would attend to things on his own initiative, and in his own way.

He seated himself on the arm of her chair, stroked the hair from her forehead, and kissed the smooth white temple.

"Well, I won't bother you now, poor little miserable girl. But I'll settle with that brute."

"He is n't!" said Elsie, trying to put spirit into her voice. "I'm the one that has done wrong. He has n't done anything to me."

"No, does n't look like it," sarcastically. "You look so happy. It's a positive shame to even want to interfere with such happiness." He rose and bent over her. "Go upstairs, and lie down now, pet. You need rest and sleep. Besides, you don't want

that girl to see you like this. Come. Let me see you start."

He almost lifted her out of the chair and led her to the foot of the staircase. There he kissed her and stroked her cheek soothingly. "Cheer up," he whispered, "everything will come all right. Trust me. It's darkest before dawn, you know. Now go up and take a good sleep."

And Elsie went obediently up the stairs without even turning to look back.

Elsie lay on her bed for an hour or more. Sleep was entirely out of the question and thought almost as impossible. She was like a woman stunned by a great loss. And that was actually what she was. On the surface but a very slight thing had happened. But Elsie was not deceived as to the inner significance of the afternoon's events. She knew that her dream and hope of happiness was gone — a dream that she had hardly ventured to picture in just so many lines to herself, but which had been surely with her nevertheless — the dream of one day possessing the love and respect of the man who stood between her and the world as husband, though she was no wife. She knew how dear had been the gradually growing companionship between them, how precious, how carefully nursed by her; how treasured each look of awakening interest, each slowly lengthening dinner chat, each desultory walk together round the pretty garden. Gone now, past

all hope. She knew Alan well enough for that.

It did not seem to her that it would be humanly possible to face him at dinner that night. But no other course was to be thought of. To absent herself was to admit not only guilt but the realization of guilt. So, about five o'clock she rose, and bathed her pale face in first hot, then cold water to force up a color, dressed her hair with greater than usual care, and put on the blue-silk gown. And then she paced and fidgeted from place to place till Alan came.

He greeted her pleasantly, just as she knew he would. And at the table he was neither sulky nor silent. He discussed the cave-in at the excavation for a big city building; mentioned the opinion of a confrere of an opera company then in the city; made some observations upon an automobile contest then being held by the two evening papers. But his words could just as easily have been addressed to the person sitting next to him in a street car for all the familiarity or comradeship they expressed. He was evidently not going even to refer to either Una Hamby's interview with himself or his meeting with Elsie and Renshaw. He was going to ignore both, as being outside his life as he intended to make it. And Elsie accepted the verdict in silence. She closed the door of the roseate temple of hope behind her, and stood without, friendless, hopeless, alone.

After dinner she roamed in the garden until dark

fell, and then came into the living-room, where Alan had already switched on the lights and was reading. She sat quietly down, herself, and placed a book on her knee for effect, though she made no attempt to read. She was suffering a revulsion of feeling from the stunned and enfeebled calm of the afternoon. She was raging, rebelling within herself at everything and every one. She felt she could fly at Alan and take him by the shoulders and shake him with every atom of strength she possessed, and make him scold, catechize, bully her, beat her — anything, anything, but this calm ignoring of her and her life as a thing so weak and disloyal as to be beneath a man's anger! She raged and seethed at the thought of Willett and his smiling insistence; at fate that had set her down in the midst of a set of circumstances with which she could not cope. But creeping through her rage, and in spite of it, came the unwelcome recognition, the realization which coolly forced itself upon her, that this, her greatest undoing, had been of her own making. Where Renshaw had been concerned, she had been weak, shilly-shallying; she should have disregarded all apparent risks and cut him out of her life. It was plain enough. She had been safely led through everything. Out of all the seemingly impossible situations, the almost insurmountable difficulties that had confronted her, she had come safely and well. Only her own perversity had done her any lasting harm.

CHAPTER XXIII

THINGS went on as usual during the following week; but on the Monday following that Alan did not go to the office. He stayed at home and read the newspaper and smoked in the garden. Elsie divined, of course, what had happened; and by the fact that Alan made absolutely no comment one way or another, she knew that he either knew or surmised her knowledge of the matter. And for the days that followed she could hardly bear her life, she was in such a state of nervous suspense. It was truly such a state of affairs as she described to Addie when that lady called up and demanded that she come over.

"Oh, don't ask me, Addie! I should drive you crazy. Positively, I'm like a cat on hot bricks."

"Hm-m. Are you alone?"

"Yes, just at present."

"The blow has fallen, has n't it?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Well —"

"Why did you think so?" interrupted Elsie.

"Did Willett call up?"

"Yes. But he did n't say anything about that, silly."

"I suppose not. But you could draw your own inferences," asserted Elsie. "I noticed my daily calls ceased simultaneously."

Addie laughed. "Yes. Rather marked, is n't it? Well, come along over. You can walk round the room at the rate of five miles an hour if you want to. I can't for the life of me see why you let it affect you so. It's so much better there should be a change. Things could n't go on as they were. I'm going to send the electric round."

So Elsie went over and spent the morning being alternately scolded and comforted. But on her way home to luncheon there recurred to her the memory of Una Hamby's vindictive gaze at the threshold of Mr. Calthorpe's office. What did it matter now, thought Elsie bitterly, whether Una struck at her through Alan or still delayed the blow? The harm was already done and she herself had done it. Yet she knew, as she let herself in at the front door, that even now she was unwilling to face the test that Una might impose.

Smiting upon her brain at that very instant, as she closed the door behind her, came the voice of Una Hamby, impassioned, sobbing, from the morning-room.

"I had to tell you the whole secret — everything — or you could not possibly understand why I came or what I am talking about. Won't you please try to see the situation as I do?"

Elsie took a step in the direction of her enemy's voice. A calm courage had succeeded the first shock of realization that the dreaded hour had struck. It seemed just as well now that the whole miserable business should be gone into, the three of them together.

Starting across the living-room, Elsie paused a second to place her gloves and a roll of music upon the table. She had taken her courage — poor, palpitating thing that it was — in both hands, and meant to face bravely whatever was coming; but back to her swept the old, unreasoning fear, the sick feeling of apprehension that, like an opiate applied to the nerves, robbed her limbs of strength and stiffened her lips. Still, she turned resolutely away from the table, and toward the morning-room — and then paused again.

Alan was speaking: somehow she had to hear what he would say, to know how he had taken Una's disclosures. His voice retained its pleasant quality, but was firm and businesslike, and Elsie recognized with a faint feeling of relief and pleasure that it was hardly sympathetic.

"No, I'm sorry I can't see things as you do," he said. "Your vision is distorted just now. You're nervous and overwrought. I know that if you were your own calm, sane self you would never have come here to begin with."

"I would! I had to!" declared Una. From the catch in her voice she was evidently crying. "You did n't seem to listen before. And I know if you'll only listen, and understand, and — and do as I say, you can straighten things out."

"No, I can't straighten things out," said Alan quietly. "When lives get tangled as yours are, no outsider can step in and straighten them out."

"Do you mean you —? What will you do, then?" demanded Una.

"I shall do nothing," with decision. "Things must take their course and work themselves out."

"But that'll ruin us all," argued Una in her broken, tearful voice. "And what is the use of ruining my life, too?"

"No one can ruin our lives unless we allow it," asserted Alan, quietly. "It may seem so for a while, but in the final outcome you'll find it has n't been done. That is my belief, and my hope."

"But they do — It is," declared Una impatiently and a trifle incoherently.

Alan had nothing further to say, apparently. Elsie, from her knowledge of him, could picture him sitting watching his visitor with quiet, disapproving eyes.

"Won't you — That's what I came for," went on Una, still persisting; "so that we three could talk things over. We must: It's the only way. I

can't stand it any longer. I can't sit by and see everything — going — Can't you see that if you —”

But Alan interrupted her. “Now, Miss Hamby, I don't want to seem unkind, but we may as well end this discussion at once. I shall have nothing whatever to say to Mrs. Leland about this matter. I shall not even mention your visit, knowing, as I have said, that when your better judgment returns you'll be the first to rejoice that no one knows of it.”

“But why?” insisted Una, apparently ignoring the implied rebuke; “why won't you even discuss it?”

“Because it's undignified, for one thing, and useless, for another,” explained Alan. Perhaps out of consideration for her evident distress, he spoke gently, but still firmly. “You could hardly expect Mrs. Leland to admit any such state of affairs as you claim.”

As she recognized more and more the hopelessness of her mission, Una sobbed unrestrainedly. “Why, how could she —”

But Alan interrupted her again and his voice took on an added curtness. He had evidently recognized the fact that he was dealing with a hysterical woman.

“Now, Miss Hamby, you must pardon me, but I

can't allow this interview to go any further, for your sake as well as for mine. I am truly sorry for your unhappiness. But I'm afraid you have given way to your emotions lately until they are undermining your judgment. That is a state of affairs that can easily come about and is a state very much to be dreaded. Make up your mind to await the outcome of things with dignity. That's really all you can do, and so you may as well do it in a way to preserve your own and every one else's respect."

He waited a second, but the girl's furious sobbing was the only reply.

"I'll get out the car and run you home," he said then. "And you can have a good rest. We'll forget all this. It's fortunate that there happens to be no one in the house just now. We —"

Elsie, standing transfixed by the table, was suddenly galvanized into life by these words. No one in the house! That was it. If she disclosed her presence now she would but open up an issue that Alan had summarily closed. Una had shot her arrow and it had missed its mark. She had told her story and it had not been believed. Elsie took up her gloves, turned silently and swiftly, and slipped up the staircase.

Very softly she closed the door of her room, stole across the floor, and literally sank into the wide, sympathetic embrace of the cretonne chair. Sitting in

motionless silence, she heard the car come down the runway from the garage, heard the hall door shut, heard the car drive away.

After all was silent, she still sat quiet, her hat still on her head, her hands still clasping the gloves she had so hurriedly snatched from the table. For a while she was too startled and shaken to think connectedly. Her wits seemed scattered. Her thoughts danced from one possibility to another. But back of her nervousness and trepidation, and soon engulfing and dispelling them, was a big, warm thought, a sense of comfort. She was still Alan Leland's wife. He had not repudiated her to this woman who was her enemy. While he had not actually said in so many words that he considered Una's statements irrational and the product of a disordered mind, he had plainly intimated as much. If he had not believed her story when twice told, he never would. There was now no harm that Una could do to her!

So great was her relief that at first Elsie could hardly realize the depth of it. But for the first time she sensed the promise of happiness ahead. Her future was surely now in her own hands. She still had much to live down, apparently, and that seemed unjust. But there must be some reason for it. And she could do it. The very fact that she was willing — glad — to go with Alan wherever and into whatever fortune he went would surely be proof enough of her sincerity.

Presently, coming back with a start to the needs of the present, Elsie got up and began to dress for dinner. She had recollected that whipped cream entered into the plans for the dinner dessert. And as Ada had an unpleasant predilection for expediting the whipping process by the addition of white of egg, Elsie generally circumvented the situation and avoided the necessity for scolding by whipping the cream herself.

If at dinner that night Alan noticed a new buoyancy in Elsie's manner, or the light in her eyes which hope and the promise of a fighting chance had given, he made no comment by word or look. He was pleasant and chatty; and Elsie admired and loved afresh his ability to be this without sign of effort.

CHAPTER XXIV

RATHER early the next morning Addie called her. Addie was much impressed with the heavy portent of events now transpiring in her friend's life and was loath to be uninformed for even so much as a day.

"Hello, kidlets," she breathed in her funny little, mysterious voice. "Alone?"

"No."

"Oh." Addie apparently reflected a moment. Then, "Anything new?"

"Yes."

"Oh." A pause. Then, "Can you come over?"

"Yes. I'll run over after luncheon," answered Elsie. "Had you planned to be at home?"

Addie answered in the affirmative and both hung up.

Addie did not fail to notice at once the change, slight and indefinable as it might be, in Elsie's demeanor. Addie McKeene's mind was intuitive. Like a sunlit lake it caught every passing change of shade or radiance. And so, after a glance at her friend's face, she smiled in eager anticipation of good news. Or at all events, better news.

Elsie tossed aside her hat and without any prompting or questioning sat down and told her companion, in detail, of the happening of the previous afternoon. She was curious to see the effect of her narrative upon Addie, though she felt she could pretty well guess beforehand with what motive Addie would invest Una's visit.

The eagerness died out of Addie's eyes and they grew almost comically wide as she listened to what Elsie had to say. Apparently her amazement at Una's act was equaled only by her surprise at the cheerful way in which Elsie accepted it.

"Well!" she said then, after Elsie, having in her narrative safely arrived in her room and closed the door, had stopped speaking. "She certainly has nerve! In the morning-room, too."

"I imagine Alan took her in there," surmised Elsie, "because if Ada came into the dining-room for anything she could hear what was going on in the living-room. And Miss Hamby sounded a little hysterical."

"Hm." Addie continued to gaze in a sort of meditative surprise at her friend. "There's simply no telling what a jealous woman will do, is there?"

"Jealous?" Elsie was at a loss.

"Well, she evidently still is." Addie withdrew her eyes from Elsie's face and looked, with a thoughtful little smile, out across the lawn before

them. "Is n't it funny how contrary things are? Here is this girl longing for something that is simply thrust upon you, and that you've decided you don't even want." She gave Elsie a fleeting, half-roguish, half-wistful smile. "You prefer a martyr's life."

It was Elsie's turn to sit and gaze fixedly at her friend. It was all she could do. She was absolutely and hopelessly bewildered.

"I suppose," went on Addie, still thinking things out, and all unconscious of the state of her friend's mind, "being in Calthorpe's office she knows all about the plan to get Alan out of the way, and — and all it might mean — and she's getting desperate."

She looked for some signs of corroboration from Elsie, but got only that wide, questioning stare.

"She looked almost haggard when I saw her the other day," Addie continued reminiscently. "It just occurred to me — You know, when she gave up the position of secretary to Willett and went to Calthorpe, we thought her affair with Willett was about over. But perhaps it was n't. She might have left Willett's office because she could n't bear — you know — to see things just die out —" The sentence trailed off. "Of course," — Addie wrinkled up her nose in a funny little movement of distaste — "she's acting in a horribly catty, underbred way now. But — I suppose it really was pretty hard

on her — just when things looked hopeful. I imagine it's hard work supporting herself and her mother nowadays."

For the first time Elsie found her voice. But she spoke in a very lifeless way.

"Well, but what can I do, more than I am doing?"

"Why, honey girl, nothing." Addie's attention flew back to her friend with quick loyalty. "I'm not blaming you. How could I? You never ran after Willett. Heavens! you never had to! No — only — I meant, if we thought of these things, perhaps we should n't hate her quite so much."

Addie paused, troubled. The old fretted, haunted look had come back to Elsie's eyes, and Addie was stricken with compunction. In her well-meaning effort to take a somewhat charitable view of a jealous woman's vagaries she had in some manner once more pulled the mantle of trouble over her friend.

"Don't look so worried, kidlets," she implored. "There never was a snarl so snarly that it did n't eventually uncurl and come out all right."

Elsie smiled faintly, suspecting that Addie's advice was strictly theoretical, as it was highly improbable that gay little lady had ever faced a snarl, either of events or of anything else.

Elsie walked home slowly and sadly. In her extreme disappointment she was very bitter. So

that was it! And she had dared to hope, to plan. As if any chance for happiness would be given to her! Yes — that was it. Elsie had marveled every time she thought of it that Una should actually attempt to set forth in so many words the astounding state of affairs between herself and Elsie. Doubtless she had not. There was no need so to risk her reputation for sanity. She had known she could do better execution with her memory, her knowledge of the love-affairs of Elsie and Willett. She was doubly equipped, with her knowledge of affairs at the office, and her knowledge of that portion of Elsie's life which for Elsie herself lay in the darkness and void behind them. And though Alan had refused to credit her words or act upon them, he had of course heard them, and must have taken them into account.

So she — or Una that was — had loved Willett, too. Both of them had, it seemed. That would account for the attraction he had for her when in his presence. Well, Addie had said no tangle was so bad but that it would eventually straighten out. Perhaps so. But Elsie could not see how this one could ever straighten out short of the ruin of one or two at least of the unfortunate participants. As she went home she formally renounced her sweet, new-born hope. There was nothing for her to do now but wait — and dread and shrink.

On the following Saturday, after dinner was

over, as Elsie was standing at the head of the French-window steps, Alan came and leaned on the lintel opposite her. He was smoking his after-dinner cigar and he took it from between his lips and gazed at the curling smoke thoughtfully. Elsie knew some announcement was coming and her heart beat heavily.

"President Calthorpe has been good enough to exert himself for me," he said presently. "By personal influence he has obtained for me what promises to be a good position with the Rio Grande and Eastern. They are beginning a big cut-off in the mountains. I start by the middle of the week. So we'd better discuss business arrangements. Of course, you can do as you like. But I was thinking that perhaps you would n't care to keep up so big an establishment as this. A flat, or an apartment, would be safer for a woman living alone, would n't it?"

"How are you going to live — where you're going?" asked Elsie, quickly.

"Me? Oh, I shall live at the railroad boarding-house, I expect," indifferently. "Or very often, at the head of big jobs like this, shacks are put up for the engineers and foremen and their families — if they have any. If so, I shall bach. I've done that before. It's better than the boarding-house."

"Well." Elsie spoke with a tremendous effort. But she *had* to say it. It was her last chance.

"Could n't you get one of those shacks, and — and take your family?"

Alan stared at her curiously. And finally in amusement, "Do you mean you?"

"Of course," with a forced little laugh. "I was n't aware you had any other family."

Alan laughed, too. "My dear girl, you don't know what you're talking about! You could n't even imagine such a life."

"I could," maintained Elsie, stoutly. "Of course I could. Any woman could. I know what living in two rooms would mean — or just about. I'd love to go," she added softly. It was the nearest approach to an entreaty that she could come.

"Strange!" said Alan after a moment, watching her with cool, reflective eyes. "You were not content with this," with a movement of the head indicative of the house behind them. "Nor with anything else of all that went to comprise the most I could get for you. And yet now you expect me to believe that you really want to live, and would really be content to live, in a two-roomed shack. What's the idea? I suppose it would be easier, and decidedly more pleasant, to effect any radical change — of partners, say — away from one's own home town. But" — he looked away down the garden, and his eyelids drooped with cynical amusement — "I don't know whether my good nature will stretch that far or not."

It seemed to Elsie that her heart stood quite still for a moment. Then she flushed scarlet. Wave after wave of color surged and beat under the fine skin; and the man across the doorway from her watched the effect with appreciative eyes. It was decidedly handsome. Some few moments passed before the choking sensation left her throat, and she could trust herself to speak. When she did the warm quality of her voice was gone. It was cold and hard.

"I should think you had better rent the house furnished, then," she observed. "Unless you want to sell it."

"I think it would be a good idea to rent it, too," agreed Alan. "But not furnished. You'll need the furniture."

"No," calmly. "I shall want nothing of yours. I think I shall be able to pack up almost as soon as you will. So you'd better hunt up some responsible agent and put the place in his hands. I fancy you'd better have the plate, linen, and most of the best china stored. I don't believe those things go with furnished houses. I'll see that they're packed and stored and the storage receipts can be sent to you. I suppose you will either store or sell the cars, as you think best."

"And what," inquired Alan quizzically, "are you going to do?"

"Earn my own living. If you don't need a house-

keeper, that's an end of the matter. I'm no parasite."

"Where are you going to earn it?" He was very much amused with this heroic fit of temper.

"Oh — have n't had time to think it over yet," coldly. "But I suppose I shall repair to that Mecca of all those ready to descend upon a waiting world — New York."

"Have you money?"

"Yes."

When she had sold the offending jewelry to pay the dressmaker, she had still been several hundred dollars to the good after paying the account. Of this she had spent very little.

"Well, there's between four and five hundred in the checking account," observed Alan. "You can take that. And I'll deposit money regularly for you with the bank here."

He was quite certain that she and Renshaw had plans to perfect, but he did not intend her to be really indebted to another man except of her own choice, or until it was fully her own choice.

Elsie looked at him, and her gaze was fully as unflinching as his own. There was no danger of her breaking down now.

"You don't seem to understand me," she said. "You can deposit what you like, where you like, but I shall not touch it. I don't call taking money from you earning my own living."

"What," inquired Alan, still plainly amused, "do you think of doing?"

"Oh," she shrugged her shoulders indifferently, "I've got a very strong voice. I shall try to make use of that — hotels, cafés, or anywhere."

Alan looked almost startled. "Well, I don't imagine you'll like that at all."

"No, perhaps not," unimpressed, "but I don't suppose I shall care one way or another. It'll be all the same."

And so it would, all the same. Despair and humiliation seemed to rise in her throat again and choke her. She turned to go. And as she turned and faced Alan, she reflected that this man — stern, uncompromising, beloved — held all her hopes of happiness, and that it was he who sent her into the outer darkness of things unloved and uncared for.

"I hope," she said, and her voice was deep and quiet, "oh, I do hope — that some day life will fall all about you like a house of cards; that you'll be so lonely that the bigness of things will frighten you. And that you'll hunger for love and encouragement and companionship — and not get it. Oh, what terrible things good people are! I'm glad I'm a sinner, because I'm human and can understand. I know now why Christ consorted with publicans and sinners. He knew they were human and could learn. He knew that the Light that he promised should light every man would be of no use to the

good people. They have the tiny lamp of their own conceit and goodness tacked on their breasts. How does it feel to be so good?" she laughed. "'Lord, I thank thee that I am not as these others.'"

And she passed into the house and went up to her room.

CHAPTER XXV

THE next three days were very busy ones. Elsie worked hard getting things to rights, having everything washable gathered and sent on rush special orders to the laundry, packing and sorting and discriminating. Through it all she kept as much as possible out of Alan's way; when forced into a discussion, business or otherwise, she was as cool and uncompromising as he. Perhaps more so. For the rest, she went about her work as a woman in a dream. All feeling seemed to be crushed into a dead calm.

On the Wednesday forenoon Alan was ready to start, and Elsie stood facing him in the living-room, waiting to say good-by. It seemed as if the blood in her veins was running very slowly, as if all life within and around her, had slowed down into a sort of stagnant silence. All that was strong and living and worth while was centered in Alan, and he was going.

"You won't forget, will you?" he was saying. "When you leave the house, if you do really decide to leave it, hand the keys over to Hammond and James. I've arranged with them. Ask for Mr. Watrous."

Elsie nodded. "I shall remember. Shall I give them the storage receipts, too? The linen is n't back yet; but it'll be packed by to-morrow night. And the piano had better go, too. People don't —"

"Oh, well, the piano was your mother's present. You would n't want to rent that," observed Alan.

"Oh!" Elsie gazed at it absently.

"I'll send you my address as soon as I know definitely what it is to be," went on Alan. "And, as I told you, I'll deposit money monthly for you."

"Yes?" Elsie's smile was cool almost to insolence.

"Yes. And — oh, yes — I've left the ready money cheque in the desk for you."

"Thank you," still smiling.

"Well," thoughtfully, "I don't think I have forgotten anything. And if I have I can write it. So — for a time, at all events — good-by." He held out his hand with a pleasant smile.

"Good-by." She put her hand into the strong brown one for the first time.

Then Alan took up his suit-case, gave one last contemplative glance round him, which took in the room and the woman before him, and went.

For many minutes Elsie stood where he had left her, hands folded before her, head slightly bent. Then she went up to her room, closed the door quietly behind her, sank down on the bed and delivered herself up to a perfect desolation of grief. She let furies of rage and grief possess her and

made not the slightest effort to control them. She did not even care to, but tossed and sobbed in a delirium of abandon. When the light grew painful to tear-inflamed eyes, she rose and drew the shades; and then went back to the hopeless, steady weeping.

And when Ada came up to know whether she would have some lunch brought up to her, she called the girl into the darkened room and gave very explicit commands. If Mrs. McKeene called up she was to say that Mrs. Leland had a bad headache and would call her later. If any one else called she was to say that Mrs. Leland was indisposed. No one was to be allowed to see her — no one. Neither was she on any consideration to bring up any one's card or a request for admission. This was a precaution against Renshaw, and was well taken. For he called up the next day, and learning that Elsie was indisposed, drove out at once and wished to see her. But Ada, though very much embarrassed, stood firm. Renshaw had to content himself with leaving a cryptic message.

By the second day after Alan's departure, Elsie had fretted and sobbed herself into a high fever. She was almost delirious with grief; but her light-headed, weak condition did not alarm her in the least. She was glad. She would be glad to die.

But she did not die, nor come anywhere near it. Perhaps if outside complications had been allowed to enter she might have managed a serious illness.

But she was alone with Mother Nature, who never loses her own. And so, on the afternoon of the third day, when anger and grief and rebellion had been given a full chance to burn themselves out, the tired woman was put into the deep sleep of exhaustion. In this sleep she remained until well into the next morning. Then she wakened, weak but healed. She felt like a burned-out volcano — a cold, empty shell of a woman — but hopelessly well. So she arose and went about her business.

Hardly able to conjure up interest in the matter, she sent to the packing and storage company for a man to pack the silver, china, and linen. The piano, too, was boxed and taken to the storage rooms. This left her only her own packing to do, and of that much was already accomplished.

She found that Alan had left her a cheque for five hundred dollars. Out of this she paid Ada an extra month's wages, and paid the storage man. The remainder she placed back in Alan's account at the bank.

On the Tuesday following Alan's departure, she sent her trunk and suit-case down to the railway station, sent for Hammond & James's representative, to whom she handed the keys of the place, then went round to say good-by to Addie.

She had called that secretly curious little lady up several times in the interim, promising to be over very shortly, but had breathed not a word of her in-

tended departure. She did not want Addie to be obliged to keep a secret, and she was determined not to see Renshaw again. As the time drew near for her to cut adrift from all she knew, to launch herself into a new life in a strange city, she felt horribly alone and hopeless. Not afraid, for she no longer had anything to lose. Willett Renshaw could be very gentle and tender when he wished to, and he generally did wish to with her. He would offer any arrangement she liked to name or think of — he had — in order to get back the woman who was slipping from him. This was partly the reason for his persistence and patience in her case. Elsie felt, too, that she was not deceiving herself when she believed that he was really fond of her. It was this — this fondness — that she dared not face.

Addie McKeene noted her friend's expression as she entered, and then welcomed her with greater affection than usual.

"Bad girl! Where's oo been?" she fussed playfully. "All dolled up, too. On your way to town?"

"No, not yet," answered Elsie, smiling, and pulling off the small hat she had chosen to travel in. "But after I've spent an hour or two with you, I'll let you get out the electric and take me to the train, if you will."

"Train!" echoed Addie. "Are you going to follow Allan so soon, then?"

"No," smiling. "I'm going in the opposite direction."

"Oh! Going to your mother?"

Elsie shook her head slowly from side to side. Addie did not ask any further questions, but as she sat and stared at her friend she was one big interrogation point, and Elsie's smile deepened.

"No," she continued, "I'm going to New York to make me one big fortune."

Addie gasped and sat on in staring silence.

"I did n't tell you about it before because I did n't want to place you in any sort of uncomfortable position," went on Elsie. "Willett might think you ought to have told him."

"Well — Are n't you going to see him again before you go?" burst out Addie.

"No," shaking her head with an air of finality.

Displeasure and disappointment showed plainly on Addie's face. It was always so when Elsie's treatment of Renshaw was the subject of either discussion or thought. For Addie was disappointed — a greater disappointment than often entered her blithe life. Greatly would she have liked to see her favorite friend Renshaw's wife, for then could the old companionship and community of interest, which the entrance of Alan Leland had broken and sometimes almost dispelled, be reëstablished. To this end had Addie welcomed the first sure signs of Renshaw's deep infatuation for Elsie, had fostered and abetted

it — always, to do her justice, with the secret conviction that it was all ultimately for Elsie's happiness; or perhaps it would be better to say a way out of unhappiness. From her point of view, Addie considered that Renshaw's treatment of Elsie had always been generous and fair.

Elsie noticed the displeased tightening of the lips of the small, amiable mouth. She drew her favorite stool forward and sat near Addie's knees.

"Don't judge, Addie," she said gently. "Don't even try to. You could n't unless you knew all. I can't tell you now. You would n't believe if I did. You'd only think — But some day I shall tell you. I want to, because you've been one of the best little friends a woman could have. You've stuck to me through good and ill repute."

"Well, why should n't I?" Addie adopted an air of bravado to cover a threatened serious loss of composure. "Did n't I always know that the ill repute was only repute? Mother Grundy's a very cross-eyed old lady most of the time. She generally sees only half the game — and that half never the woman's."

"I know. But lots of women will drop a friend if — if she gets talked about. It's all right until then," said Elsie softly.

"Not if they're really friends, they won't," maintained Addie, stoutly. "Especially if they know it's only talk."

"Well, I've done foolish things, and weak things, and — and wrong things," Elsie went on, tentatively. She was hungrily seeking some slight comforting assurance now, at the eleventh hour. "But — but not really bad things — ever — have I, Addie?"

"Why, of course not!" Addie looked at her in surprise. "No: if you had been the kind that did that sort of thing you'd have been exceedingly careful of appearances. They always are. I guess most of the things you did have been right under my eagle eye. I'm ready to stand right up in meeting" — for once the amiable Addie looked almost belligerent, as if she really faced that worldly tribunal of which they spoke — "right up in meeting, and tell the world that you're a straighter woman, really, than most of those that turned their backs."

For the moment Addie really did hate that world that had always been so lenient and indulgent to her own fun-loving self. She considered that in some impalpable and not altogether understood way it had been instrumental in vanquishing her friend. She stared very hard, almost fiercely, before her for a few seconds; and then her eyes fell, and she swallowed desperately at something that rose in her throat.

Then the two women fell hurriedly to talking of the most comfortable traveling-dress, of renting the home, of the possibility of engaging Ada for a friend of Addie's — of anything and everything they

could think of. But it was hard work. For what they might not talk of lay between them, a veiled something that could not be forgotten. And although Addie's bright, dark eyes filled with tears as she put her friend on the east-bound train and said good-by — still, in a way, it was a relief to both when it was all over.

Elsie lay wide awake in her berth through the droning, purring night, and thought. No, she did not trouble to think. Things just came and presented themselves to her. She had reached the place where all must eventually come who would see far or straight, to where she was completely detached from things and times and places. As if from some vantage-point she looked and saw how conditions and circumstances form like sand shapes round an individual, and dissolve and reform and dissolve again, and only the individual remains. She glanced back at the scenes through which she had come. All gone — but still she was. Now the only real things seemed to be herself and the aching need at her heart. She did not know yet that this need had to be or she could not persist.

Elsie had always wished to see New York; now as she drove out into it she did not even trouble to look at it. It was just another scene. Having consulted the conductor on the train, she went straight to a good second-class hotel.

Those who have nothing to lose have also noth-

ing to fear. And seeing that the things most people fear are objects primarily of their own setting up, a person entirely devoid of fear is a person to be reckoned with. To Elsie it all suddenly appeared very simple. She simply had to decide what she wanted to do — and do it.

She bought three or four of the best-known dramatic papers, looked up the office whereabouts of the manager of the biggest vaudeville circuit she knew of, consulted the hotel clerk as to the car lines and general directions, and went there. Because she was beautifully dressed, handsome, and had a straight, serene way of looking at one — and might, therefore, already be a star — she was admitted into the manager's august presence. The presence was encased in a small, stuffy inner office.

"I want to know where you get your best acts," she inquired gently.

The manager cast a sharp glance at her. "I don't get 'em," he responded shortly. "They bring their act and come here and we give 'em a try-out. What 's your act?"

"I have n't one yet," replied Elsie, sweetly. "I want to get one. That's why I wanted to know which place turns out the best."

The manager would have scowled if she had been less handsome. "I'm no information bureau," he observed sulkily.

"No, but you have the best information of this kind. And I didn't know how else to get it," elucidated Elsie, simply.

The manager snatched an envelop to him, and scribbled on the back of it. Since she had already wasted his time he might as well give her the information she wanted.

He handed her the envelop. "Go to him," he commanded. "He'll fix you up if there's anything in you. And when he has you can tell him to send you to me first. You've got nerve and looks. That's something."

Elsie went to the address indicated. But she never went back to the circuit manager. The coach in question had received a frantic appeal from the Sicilienne Quartette, whose second soprano had just been lost by sudden marriage. So he tried Elsie's voice, inquired very particularly about her wardrobe, took a big fee, and popped her into the place of the lost one. He gave her four or five pieces of music.

"These are what they'll sing to-night," he said. "Go home, and do the best you can with them. Then be at the orchestra dressing-room of the Hotel de Lys at six o'clock sharp. Never mind if you can't sing much to-night. Dress your swellest and do your best. Being a good-looker's half the battle."

He smiled — a crisp, acid sort of smile which

gave the impression that the experience from which he spoke had in its day been also etched in with acid.

"The other half is giving the people what they want. Don't think you're going to teach the people what they ought to like. They won't have it. They think they know. Find out what they already like, and give 'em that."

And Elsie hearkened and gave close heed to these words of wisdom.

CHAPTER XXVI

SO it came to pass that early the following year Eugene Calthorpe, president of the L. S. & E. Railroad, sat at dinner in the grill-room of one of the biggest hotels in Denver. He had arrived a few hours before and, having eaten a good dinner, sat sipping his liqueur with thoughtful appreciation and comfort. He heard, because he could not help it and not because he paid any particular attention, the remarks of two young men at a table near him.

"They 're swell dressers and swell lookers, all right," observed one, presumably anent the musical performers. "The blonde on the end takes my eye."

"Little too washed out," objected the other. "Like a little more color in mine. Wonder if it's possible to —"

"No, it is n't," interjected the first speaker, with a slight laugh. "Management won't stand for it. Tried it, so I know."

The singers finished a concerted number and received what for a grill was generous applause. Calthorpe was no musician, and as far as he was concerned the music was easily all right. He glanced

casually across at the palm-fringed orchestral platform, then straightened up and looked again. Then he beckoned the waiter to him and spoke in a low voice.

"One of the quartet ladies is a friend of mine. Is it possible to get a card to her?"

The waiter knew him and was deferential and embarrassed. "I'm afraid not, sir. The ladies don't like it. The management —"

Calthorpe took out one of his cards. "Take that to the manager," he commanded. "And then, if he'll permit it, take it to the lady in the brown fur and cream silk. I'll attend to you later."

Somewhat troubled, the waiter glanced round at his tables and then hurried away. A few minutes later a page offered the card to Elsie as she sat in the little orchestra dressing-room. She took it with a slight, involuntary frown, which, however, vanished as she read the name.

"I'll be in the ladies' room at the side of the lobby after the last performance," she said.

Much relieved, on receipt of this information, the waiter hurried with it to Calthorpe, adding the item that the last performance for the quartet was at ten o'clock. For his trouble he was told, on presenting the dinner check, to keep the change from a ten-dollar bill. In the meantime Calthorpe waited in his seat at the table for another appearance of the quartet.

The order of the musical program was ensemble vocal, orchestral selection, and then vocal solo; and it happened this evening that Elsie took the first solo. Calthorpe frowned slightly as she came on in her close-clinging gown of silk, the lights shining on the wonderfully clear skin — so clear that it seemed as if the flowing blood and life shone through in faint glow and bloom.

Elsie had taken well to heart the agent's early advice. If all aspiring young singers would take seasoned advice as she had, there would be fewer heartbreaks in the profession. She never attempted songs calling for delicate shading and work, either enunciatory or vocal. Such were lost amid the noises of a dining-room. She trusted to sensuous beauty of melody and never sang anything not replete with that; and as her powerful voice carried easily, she was assured at all times of a fair measure of success. She sang "La Paloma" to-night, and was called back to repeat it. She did not notice the man watching her from the table a little in front of her, for, contrary to the habit of many grill singers, Elsie made it a rule never to inspect her audiences. She sang with faintly smiling lips, and eyes that looked beyond and away. And there was a freedom of movement, an indifference, in the easy poise, that almost disarmed criticism. She was above criticism and she looked it.

Calthorpe heard with inward discomfort and dis-

approval the appraising, even if complimentary, remarks of the men about him, especially those unaccompanied by women. When Elsie had finished her singing he left the grill-room.

Her evening gown covered with a big, quiet-toned cloak, Elsie appeared a few minutes after ten. She had with her the three other members of the quartet. She held out her hand to Calthorpe with a smile of real friendliness and pleasure.

"I'm so glad to see you!" she said simply and unaffectedly. "I do think it was nice of you to remember me."

"Why you're not the kind that one forgets easily," explained Calthorpe, prompt and smilingly.

Elsie turned to the three women a little in the background. "I want you to meet my three professional sisters, Mr. Calthorpe," she said. "We have a cast-iron rule that we all go home together, and I'm asking a special dispensation for to-night."

Calthorpe smiled and looked with real cordiality at these women, who were conducting their lives so competently and well. "It's a case of the old home town," he explained with reference to Elsie's closing statement. "We'll go up on the balcony and talk solidly for an hour or so. And then I'll bring her safely home."

The Sicilienne sisters professed perfect sympathy with the situation, chatted a few minutes, then went on their way. Calthorpe turned back to Elsie.

"I never even went through the formality of asking whether you cared to spend an hour or so chatting with me," he said. When he liked any one, or was interested — which came to the same thing — he had a very gentle, intimate, understanding way about him. Elsie was conscious of a pleasant, warming glow of friendliness. She rather wondered what he wanted to talk about, and could not help thinking of Una Hamby in connection with him. Even so, she was no longer afraid. There was nothing for Una to take from her now. All she had at present she had created herself; she did not think it could be taken from her.

"Of course I want to talk," she declared quickly.

"Well, shall we go up and sit on the balcony?" queried Calthorpe. "It's open and yet quiet."

Elsie nodded willingly and they went toward the broad marble steps at the far end of the lobby. The balcony ran along one end and a side of the lobby. It was wide, and palm-lined and deeply carpeted, and filled with cozy chairs. In spite of its openness, on account of the hum from the lobby down below, a conversation could be carried on with complete privacy.

When they were seated in the far corner of the balcony, and Elsie had loosened her cloak and was otherwise comfortably ensconced for the chat, Calthorpe leaned slightly forward and smiled engagingly.

"You know, Mrs. Leland, unless you put a quietus on me, I shall ask an unconscionable lot of questions.

"All right," smiled Elsie.

"In a way you can blame yourself for it," he went on. And then in answer to Elsie's look of inquiry, "When you came to see me that afternoon — may I refer to it?" Elsie nodded instantly. "Well, you interested me very much. I saw you were putting up a brave fight. And then — I've always thought a great deal of Alan. I've often thought of both of you since — I've been able to follow Alan's doings more or less completely through his work; but I lost you. Therefore I'm just old lady enough to have been delighted when I saw you this evening. And now," he smiled warningly — "may I begin the cross-examination?"

"Yes." Elsie laughed interestedly. "I'll endeavor to keep my wits about me."

"Well, then, what is the meaning of all this?"

"You mean — my working for my living?" inquired Elsie.

"Yes."

"Oh, well!" She was slightly taken aback for an answer. "Why, it was the only thing — the only self-respecting thing — to do."

"Are you and Alan separated, then?" Calthorpe made no apology for so personal a question, but studied attentively the face before him.

"Oh, no," quickly. "That is — we are by distance, of course. But — If you mean — Not legally."

"Oh! Why did n't you go west with him?"

"He did n't want me to," simply.

"Did you want to?"

"More than I had ever wanted anything in my life." Having once confided in him, Elsie seemed to feel quite at home with this man. Besides, nothing could come of disguising matters, anyway. "But it's not his fault that I'm doing this," she hastened to add. "He is perfectly willing to support me. And for the rest, you can't blame him. It was inevitable that his trust in me should be broken. I could not expect him to have any confidence in my motives."

She spoke so openly and had such a serene, almost noble, way with her that Calthorpe was puzzled.

"You know," he said, with a slight shake of the head, "in spite of what you yourself told me, I can hardly believe that you ever really did anything so — so terrible after all."

"Well, that's it, you see — I don't actually know." She sighed a little. "I — Oh, I just don't know, that's all." She looked down into the lobby, and in her eyes was a sort of accustomed patience that somehow warred with the look of impetuous livingness that was characteristic of her.

Calthorpe looked hard at her. Apart from the

personal interest he felt, here was a problem in human psychology far too inviting to leave.

"Mrs. Leland," he said in quaint desperation, "have pity on me. You know I confessed to being an old lady. Just think how you have aroused my curiosity. I can't even guess what you mean."

Elsie's eyes came back from the lobby, and she smiled. "Well, but I said I would answer any question — if I could." This last out of deference to a sudden thought. "Any question" was very sweeping.

Calthorpe took due notice of the addition. He left her last puzzling statement alone for a while. Sometimes the longest way round was the only way.

"Does Alan write to you?" he asked.

"No."

"Did he know that you — came to see me that time?"

"Oh, no, indeed!"

"Does he know that you're doing this?" with a wave of the hand down toward the grill.

"I don't suppose so."

"Did n't he write to you at all after leaving for the West?"

"He may have. I did n't leave any forwarding address. And I told the bank to notify him that the money he sent lay there."

"Dear me!" Calthorpe lifted his brows quizzically.

"Well," flushing slightly, "I did n't want his money if he did n't — did n't want me."

"Well, but that 's — let 's see — eight months ago now, about, is n't it?" She nodded. "How do you know he does n't want you now?"

"Oh, I know," with a queer little smile.

"Well —" Calthorpe looked as if he did not unreservedly accept this. But he let it drop for the time being.

"Mrs. Leland," he said then, "have you a friend — a tried and trusted friend — in whom you can confide and whose judgment you trust?"

Elsie shook her head decidedly. "No. Oh, I have a friend — but — Not as to the good judgment part."

"Have n't you ever talked this — your affairs over with any one? — any one at all?"

"No one at all since I left home. Only partially — I mean, just what they knew of — before I went away."

"I thought so," confidently. "There 's a look in your eyes that tells me you have n't unburdened to any one. And you need to. Yes, positively need to." He looked intently at her and his smile was very kindly. "We all have to, sooner or later. It 's a human necessity. More — a psychological necessity. I see you have won out in the fight you made. But still — I can see everything is far from right yet. A third party is needed here. I believe I could

help you. I know I want to. Could n't you trust me?"

"Oh, I do trust you!" declared Elsie quickly and truthfully. She did. Once you approached near enough to him, there was no mistaking the clean, understanding heart of this man.

"Well, then," with his pleasant smile, "suppose we talk things over. You tell me your view of the case. Begin at the beginning of the trouble, whatever it is. And don't ever think that I shall presume to sit in judgment. I only want to help."

Elsie's lip quivered very slightly. She had never confided in any one, of course. It was the last thing she had ever dreamed of doing. But, when he spoke of it, she knew what a relief it would really be to be able to talk to some one of that which was slowly freezing her heart up. But she shook her head. "I'm afraid," she said, smiling wistfully.

"Afraid?" he echoed. She nodded.

"But —" He was astonished. "What of?"

"Oh-h —" She hesitated. But he was looking straight at her. "Of — of having people think I'm the victim of —"

"Well?" he urged.

"Of hallucinations," she finished with a jerk.

"My dear little girl!" Calthorpe was hopelessly puzzled. And amazed. "Yes, you certainly need help. But — tell me what you mean." Then as she still sat silently gazing at him, he added, almost im-

patiently, "Surely you can't think I'd want to harm you!"

"No. Oh, no — you would n't want to harm me — only —"

"Well — only what?"

"Only you might think it was for my good to — to —" She gave an uneasy little laugh. "Oh, I've always felt that, as long as no one knew, I was safe."

Calthorpe gazed at her with mingled feelings. But he was more than ever determined not to let this woman go until she was at least on the road to healing.

"Suppose," he said gently, "I give you my solemn word that after you've told me — whatever it is you have to tell me — that I'll neither take the least step in any direction, nor breathe of it to a soul in the world, without your permission. How would that be?"

Elsie looked at him, an eagerness growing in her heart. "It would take some time to tell," she demurred.

"Our time is our own at present," he said quietly. Then repeated with a smile, "Begin at the beginning."

"I could only begin at the morning after the accident," she said hesitatingly, still afraid, when all was said and done, to dig out her secret.

"Well, begin wherever you can best. Come," he encouraged. "You've been so courageous all

through. Begin as if you were telling the story of another."

"And I have your promise to — to forget it all — entirely — if I want you to?"

"You have, absolutely," gravely. "Now, don't leave anything out. Just pretend I'm the lawyer — or the doctor — in the case."

CHAPTER XXVII

AT first Elsie hesitated as she began her story. She had to be prompted with judicious questioning here and there. After she was inevitably committed to her disclosures, and as she began to live again in her own mind the events as she recalled them, she talked simply and quietly. Her eyes looked at the teeming lobby, but they were the eyes of a woman whose mind was far elsewhere.

Calthorpe glanced at her from time to time. For the most part he listened with his eyes on the floor. He was following her very intently, and an intent gaze might distract her thought and memory. As it was, she was telling a very connected story, neither exaggerating nor glossing anything as it had seemed to her. She told of her first meeting with Alan; of her visits to Una in the hospital; of her meetings with Renshaw; even of her housekeeping difficulties.

After she had brought her story up to the time of Alan's departure for the West, she paused and looked at Calthorpe for the first time.

"Go on," he smiled. "You are not up to the present yet."

So she told of her journey to New York, and of the incidents — most unimportant — leading up

to the present. Then she could wait no longer.

"Now tell me!" she cried, and there was a strained note in her usually soft voice. "Teli me just what you think. What could Una do to me? Am I Una and is she Elsie, or is she — Tell me —"

Calthorpe smiled reassuringly. "No, you're Elsie Leland, and always have been. And she's Una Hamby, and always has been."

Elsie's lips parted breathlessly. "Do — But — Do you really think —"

"There is nothing else to think," calmly.

"But — Then how is it I can't remember anything of Elsie's life?"

"Well, but you can't remember anything of Una's either, can you?"

"No —" She stared at him.

"It's just a simple case of loss of memory. Complete loss of memory. That is a fairly frequent result of an accident." He spoke in a very casual, matter-of-fact way — perhaps in a studiedly matter-of-fact way.

"Yes — but — Why should I wake up thinking — *knowing* — I was Una?" demanded Elsie. "I did n't even know such a person existed."

"That does require a little more thought and explanation," conceded Calthorpe easily. "But I know there's a perfectly natural explanation for it."

He leaned back in his chair slightly, and looked

away across the lobby for a moment or so. The girl before him watched and waited anxiously.

"You remember you waked up from a sort of dream or coma," he said then, his eyes coming back to her face with that easy, comforting smile. "I think there's no doubt some one discussed Una Hamby and the accident in your hearing."

"Well, then I should remember it," argued Elsie quickly.

"Not necessarily. Not at all necessarily." He leaned forward toward her again. "I don't suppose you know much of these things. You are too young. But it's a fully recognized fact — it's the one fact that accounts for and explains all the marvels of hypnotism — that, during the abeyance, for any reason, of the objective mind, the subjective mind will accept any suggestion made to it, and work it out to a perfectly logical conclusion — even to supplying a new and logically equipped personality."

Elsie watched him with eager eyes. As he surmised, she knew little or nothing of the subject he mentioned. But her understanding was keen — the last year had made it still keener — and she did so want to be convinced.

"You were unconscious, or at all events in a comatose condition, from the shock," he went on. "Your objective, or conscious mind, was asleep. But the subjective mind never sleeps. It is the sustaining power of the entities which we are. Probably — in

fact, doubtless — some one near you discussed Una in connection with the accident. When you awoke, having no memory of your own personality to combat it, the subjective mind supplied this one which had been suggested to it.”

“ Could that really — ? ”

“ Not only could, but would have to be,” decidedly. “ Not only is this case in strict keeping with the laws governing cases of this kind, but, given those laws and those circumstances, nothing else could result.”

“ And you think — ” Elsie’s wide eyes stared with eagerness into his — “ you are sure I am Elsie and always shall be ? ”

“ Most certainly.”

“ Oh ! ” It was a veritable sob of joy and relief. “ I feel like a human being again ! ”

Almost overcome with intense feeling, she covered her face with her hands. Calthorpe glanced hastily round. There were many people on the balcony, but none very close to them, and none, apparently, paying any attention to them.

In a moment or so Elsie looked up. She made a visible effort to calm and collect herself. Her face was pale, but her eyes shone with a new light — a new hope.

“ I almost feel as if I could bear anything now,” she said. “ You are sure I can depend — ”

“ Why, of course,” with a reassuring laugh.

Then, almost pityingly, "You poor child! What a nightmare you have lived through, when just a little understanding would have put you right."

Elsie sighed reminiscently. "But," she said, almost nervously, after a moment or so — she was going, hastily, excitedly, over those troublous times behind her — "When I went to the hospital to see Una, why should I expect her to have dark hair and gray eyes — just as she had?"

Calthorpe smiled. "Don't crowd my scientific resources too fast. But I should think probably that might result from the fact that Una's face was the last you saw before the crash."

"Well, and then why would she — You know, I told you how she acted toward me," went on Elsie, eagerly pressing for still further light. "Why should she hate me? She couldn't know me any more than I knew her. Why should she feel so ugly?"

"Now you have got me in a corner," confessed Calthorpe. "I don't see at all why she should feel so antagonistic. But no doubt there's some perfectly ordinary reason. And of course she'd know you — by sight, anyway. Why not? Her memory was unimpaired."

"Oh — h!" It was a long sigh of understanding. "Oh! of course!"

So great was the sudden revelation that rushed in

upon Elsie that she could not voice it. She sat and stared at the man before her. And he smiled, kindly and amused.

"Yes? Is a great light breaking in?" he asked.

"Oh, of course! I forgot — well, I did n't think for the minute — about her being able to remember. Of course she 'd hate the sight of me." Elsie gazed questioningly at Calthorpe as if he could read her thoughts. "Do you suppose she —"

"Well, I can hardly tell," smiled Calthorpe. "Unless you enlighten me a little further."

"You know Miss Hamby was Mr. Renshaw's secretary before she came to you."

"Yes." Calthorpe nodded reflectively.

"Well, I was told that she was — Oh, I don't know whether she was actually engaged to Mr. Renshaw or not, but — but I think she expected to be." Elsie faltered a little in this discussion of another girl's love-affair.

"Oh," commented Calthorpe gravely. He recollected that when engaging Una Hamby it had occurred to him to wonder slightly why, having such unqualified testimonials from Renshaw, she had left his employ. He could not recollect that he had questioned her at all on the subject. If he had, she had doubtless answered him in a satisfactory manner. But now a great many things explained themselves to him with almost the suddenness of revelation, even as they did to Elsie.

"And do you think that, when I was talking to her at the hospital about having taken her place, she supposed all the while I was referring to — to Mr. Renshaw?" queried Elsie, staring in amazement at the idea.

"No doubt at all," said Calthorpe thoughtfully. "You talked at entirely cross-purposes. You had one thing in mind, she another. Neither would be explicit. You were afraid to be; she was too angry and proud." He considered the matter for a moment or so, and then looked suddenly up. "Well, for that matter, Alan can enlighten us on this particular point. She talked to him, you say. He'll know what she had in mind."

"Oh!" With a distinct shadow falling across her face, there came back to Elsie the thought of Alan and his share in all the matters discussed. In the joy of her deliverance she had forgotten him for the moment.

"Yes," nodded Calthorpe, quick to follow her thought. "Now we come to Alan. Are you going to tell him how things have cleared themselves up? Or shall I?"

Elsie clasped her hands nervously on her knees. "Do you think he'll believe it?"

"Why, of course he'll believe it!" promptly. "Why should n't he? There's nothing whatever to tax any one's credulity. Besides, the thing explains itself."

She sat and looked at him, hope and fear and longing struggling in her eyes.

"Come, now," encouraged Calthorpe gently. "Go to him and tell him what you have just told me."

But Elsie shrank visibly from the idea. "Oh, I could n't!" she cried. "I asked him right straight out in so many words to take me with him and he refused just as straightly. How could I go to him after that?"

"Elsie," he said — and did not notice that he had called her that — neither did she — "you must remember that Alan has been quite in the dark all this time. He could only judge of your actions as a mere outsider might. Alan is a little bit stern in his way of looking at things. That's one of the faults of very straight people. They have n't quite so much understanding as — others. But Alan is not an unreasonable man. I can't imagine why you did n't go to him at once for help, when you woke and found yourself in such a terrible predicament."

"Oh, I could n't!" exclaimed Elsie. "How could I? He was a stranger to me. And I seemed to have stepped into such — such dreadful things."

"Have you ever been able to discover just what it was that had so estranged Alan?" inquired Calthorpe thoughtfully.

"Why, no particular act. At least I've never heard anything of any specific act. I think it was

my fondness — or apparent fondness — for Mr. Renshaw's company." Elsie wrinkled her brows in a puzzled way. "I can't imagine how I ever came to like that. I think it must have been for the exciting times we all had together. I — Oh, of course I can't even understand it now. But," she lifted her head and looked straight at him, "though there's a lot of weak foolishness to regret, there's nothing more. I asked Mrs. McKeene just before I came away. She has evidently always been my closest friend. I asked her if I had anything more than — anything worse than — than foolishness to regret, and she said decidedly not. And she knows."

"Undoubtedly she would," agreed Calthorpe, confidently. "And I feel the same conviction, myself. So there is nothing to keep you from going to Alan as much for the sake of his happiness as your own. He loved you very much. I'm sure of that."

"But he does n't now," asserted Elsie sadly.

"I don't agree with you for a minute," said Calthorpe, calmly. "To begin with, you're not a woman a man would easily forget. And Alan is not a man to change in a hurry. He is essentially a one-woman man. And besides," he went on gravely, "even if the worst came to the worst, and he did not wish to have you with him again, would n't you still be glad you had gone to him and told him everything? You would have done your best then and your heart would be at rest. You have been so

brave so far. Are you willing to leave this last stone unturned?"

Elsie's reply was little better than a whisper: "No."

But there was very little hope or animation in her face as she sat gazing before her. Evidently this new task facing her was a very trying one.

"Might n't I write?" she hazarded then.

"No," decidedly. "The personal appeal is better."

Calthorpe was doing some rapid thinking, himself. He was immensely interested in this case. Not for years had anything appealed to him so strongly. He was loath to abandon it unfinished, and still subject to disaster.

"I'll tell you what I think," he went on then. "I have a notion to come with you myself. I have n't thought the matter over, but I'd like somehow to have a talk with Alan first of all, with you somewhere in the background. Would you trust things entirely to my discretion?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" eagerly.

Calthorpe nodded. "Well, I must think it over. But I could n't go this week — not until the end of next at the earliest, I'm afraid. I've got to get back to the office, and —"

"Oh, and I could n't leave the girls without getting a suitable substitute, either," said Elsie, quickly.

"No, of course not," approvingly. "Well,

then — How long do you expect to be here?"

"Only this week. Then we go to Minneapolis."

"Well, that'll be all right. You can drop me a line from there to the office, giving me your address and the date you can get off. I'll find out particulars as to train times, Alan's station, and all that. I know it's somewhere in northern California — near the Oregon state line. But I'll get all necessary data. And now," he touched her lightly on the wrist, "I'm going to take you home. You're tired out, and must have a good rest."

Elsie rose. Many emotions were still struggling in her eyes, but the expression of her face was infinitely more natural than the set, repressed calm of earlier in the evening. Calthorpe looked at her appraisingly.

"Where did you say you girls live?"

"In the apartment block, six blocks from here — housekeeping apartments," she told him. "We always do if we can. We get so that we hate anything that looks like a grill or a restaurant."

They went down and walked leisurely the six blocks. Neither talked much. Calthorpe felt enough had been said for the present.

As they stopped in the vestibule of the apartment house, Calthorpe looked down at the pale, quiet face of the girl before him. "You'll sleep to-night, won't you?" he said smilingly.

She looked up at him, her hand outstretched.

“ Oh, Mr. Calthorpe, when I think of all the trouble you have taken, and are — are going to take, I — oh, I can hardly believe it! I don’t want to sound silly, but I shall certainly pray for something special for you!” — she laughed, to cover her deep feeling — “an extra diamond in your crown.”

Calthorpe took the hand she held out. “ Dear lady, if I have succeeded in helping you at all, I am more than rewarded this minute.”

And that was the truth.

CHAPTER XXVIII

NEARLY three weeks later, about ten o'clock one morning, Elsie descended from a Southern Pacific train, upon the little wooden platform at Berkhold's Crossing. Calthorpe met her with a smile and a hand-shake, and a very matter-of-fact air to offset her evident nervousness. In order not to leave her waiting there alone, it had been necessary for him to reach Berkhold's overnight. But it never occurred to him that it was out of the way or undignified for the president of a railroad and an important man of affairs to spend a day or two trying to adjust the tangle in the lives of a man and a woman. Not at all. He was more whole-heartedly interested and wrapped up in what he was doing now than in anything he had undertaken for a long time. And that is saying much, for Calthorpe was a man who found life interesting at every point.

Berkhold's Crossing was not even a hamlet. It was merely a combined store and post-office on one side of the road, and on the other a big barn-like garage, and a rambling, patchy-looking house which dignified itself by the name of Berkhold's Hotel. The fact that the road in question was the Pacific Highway was the wherefore primarily of the existence of the place.

Calthorpe pointed to a distinct cleft in the amphitheater of hills surrounding the place. "The camp's up there," he said, as he piloted Elsie over to the hotel. "There's an auto-train business that runs up over the track. It'll be going up after noon, and we'll go up in it. We'll have lunch at the hotel first. That will really be the best possible kind of an arrangement all the way round. They tell me the cutting is about two miles above the camp now, and Alan will almost certainly be up there by the time we reach camp. Then I can leave you in camp and go up and have a talk with Alan, myself, first. See?"

She nodded obediently. She had made up her mind to leave everything to him, to do just as he directed. She had told him she would. She realized, where he did not, the more than ordinary value of his time and effort. If she had not, it is doubtful whether she would ever have actually reached Berkhold's. She was a proud woman at heart, and many times on the way down, despite the size of the stake ahead, her courage had failed her woefully.

As they waited for the lunch hour to approach, Elsie was a study in restlessness and fidgets. She sat on the porch a while; she wandered round the garden; she visited the chicken yard and watched the chickens. Not so Calthorpe. He was already interested in the life of the little place. The widow Berkhold, who kept the hotel, had explained how

her son had come to build the garage. So many automobile breakdowns occurred at the foot of the big hill leading up to and into the little cup in the hills which the place was. She told how in the first place she had merely built a home to be near him; but when so many auto parties stopped there, some of them insisting on staying all night, the home gradually grew to be a hotel. Calthorpe's experience told him that from just such small beginnings great things grow; and he went over to talk to the young man in the garage and to point out the great possibilities ahead.

At lunch, which was eaten by all alike at one long table, about a dozen men gathered. Calthorpe listened to the talk of local men and things, but was diverted every moment of the time, and enjoyed his meal. But poor restless Elsie could not. She ate a biscuit and drank a cup of coffee, and that, notwithstanding the troubled solicitations of the landlady, was all she could manage.

It seemed to her an interminable time before they were really seated in the auto-bus affair, and off on their great adventure. It was a wonderfully interesting ride to any who would note. The little auto-train traveled across high trestles built over deep ravines, and over creeks and swollen mountain streams; and Calthorpe was interested from a technical and every other point of view.

On reaching camp, the auto-bus stopped at a plank

platform built before a row of portable buildings, which constituted the commissary, the mess house and the cook-house. Calthorpe helped Elsie down with the quiet, abstracted air of a man who now begins the real business of the day.

"Now," he said to her, in a quiet aside, "we'll find out which is Alan's room, or tent, or shack, or whatever he has. Then you can go and wait there while I go up to the cutting. If things go all right — and I'm quite sure they will — I'll bring him back down with me. If — if I think things are not really ready just yet, I'll come back alone, and he need not know you've been here — at least, not till we're gone."

Elsie nodded mutely. From the look in her eyes Calthorpe told himself that one of the very hardest things he would ever have to do in his life would be to come back down that track alone. However, he turned briskly to the commissary man who stood in his doorway, amiably curious and waiting to be interviewed.

"Which is Mr. Leland's place?"

"Oh, Mr. Leland's up at the cutting," returned the man promptly.

"I know that," mildly; "but which is his room?"

The man pointed up the hill behind them to a small edition of the portable buildings. A distinct path led to it from the platform where they stood.

"Well, you go up there, and wait," instructed Cal-

thorpe, turning to the waiting Elsie, "while I go up to the cutting."

"The lady can sit in the office here," suggested the commissary man. "There's a stove."

"Oh, thanks. But I sha'n't be long," said Calthorpe pleasantly. "She'll be all right."

A few feet away from the commissary, but not on the platform, stood another portable, whose tastefully draped windows bespoke a woman's presence. Indeed, within it a young woman could be seen, gazing curiously in their direction.

"I expect my wife would be glad to have her sit with her," hazarded the commissary man further.

Calthorpe smiled, amused at this troublesome exhibition of thoughtfulness. Elsie had already started up the path.

"I expect she'd rather go up to Mr. Leland's room. If he does n't keep it tidy," he added smilingly, "it serves him right to have his wife see it."

"Oh!" The man looked after Elsie in very evident surprise. Plainly the existence of a wife for Alan had never been suspected.

Calthorpe waited till Elsie reached the shack, tried the door, and found it open. She turned and nodded to him, and then stepped inside.

Then Calthorpe began his work on the driver of the auto-bus, who was at first scandalized at the proposition that he should drive the visitor up to the cutting.

"I might meet the work train coming down. Then where 'd I be?" he demanded.

"Don't know." Calthorpe's eyes twinkled. "Depends on where you met it."

However, the commissary man volunteered the information that there was no earthly reason for the work train to come down until it brought the men down at night. Therefore, in consideration of the fact that Calthorpe was a great friend of Mr. Leland's, which fact was considerably augmented in weight by the addition of a five-dollar bill, he consented to risk the journey.

Alan turned in surprise as the auto-bus, with many and loud blasts of a particularly raucous horn, approached the cutting, and came to a stop behind the work train. It was doubtless some of the line officials, although he was not expecting any one. When Calthorpe climbed carefully out and down onto the ties, he was indeed amazed.

"President Calthorpe!" he exclaimed, hastening forward, and meeting the outstretched hand with a hearty clasp. "How good it seems to see you! — like a breath of home and old times."

Calthorpe patted him on the shoulder. "Good lad, to feel like that," he said gently. Then, "Yes. I'm on my way down south, and so I stopped off to see you."

"Well, that's mighty nice of you," said Alan, sincerely, realizing all that meant to a busy man.

"Not at all. I wanted to." He turned partly round, and looked critically up and down the cutting. "I'm hearing fine accounts of your work," he said cordially. "I suppose the line will have it in for me pretty badly, but I expect to take you from them shortly. Oh, not till you have finished this particular piece of work, of course. That would n't be fair. But I'm working on a splendid job for you. A big chance to make a name for yourself — and that's just what I want to see you do. Headquarters in San Francisco. How would that be?"

"Fine!" Alan looked frankly at the man beside him. "And Mr. Calthorpe, you don't know what it means to me to know that you'll do all this for me — that you have n't forgotten me."

"Forgotten! Of course not! I don't forget men who, you might almost say, start their careers with me. I always thought a lot of you, Alan. You know that. I still feel that you're one of my family. And now let's have a chat. Can you spare a half-hour?"

"Yes, indeed." Alan laughed. It would be odd if he could not do so, in view of Calthorpe's lavish expenditure of time upon him.

"All right," nodding contentedly. "Let's go and sit on that log. Tell the auto magnate to wait."

CHAPTER XXIX

SITTING on the log, each man lit his pipe contentedly. Calthorpe looked up and down the busy cutting, and then at the fine, lithe figure in corduroys and leggings beside him.

"Ever get lonesome, Alan?"

"Oh-h — no. I read and study at night. In the daytime, of course, I have no chance to get lonesome," smiling.

"No," reflectively. Then, indicating with a nod of the head the bustling scene before him, "You know, Alan, you've really got a much better chance of advancing in your profession in a project like this, than — than you had with us."

"I suppose so," Alan agreed with a nod.

"Yes. Things always turn out for the best. Although," frowning slightly, "I hated that affair last summer pretty badly. If I had known —"

"Oh, I knew you did n't know anything about it," hastily, and with the air of a man who dismisses an unpleasant subject.

"Oh, yes, I did know all about it, thanks to your wife," corrected Calthorpe calmly. "But not in time."

"To my wife?" repeated Alan, staring at him.

Calthorpe nodded. "Yes. She came and told me of the rumor of your pending discharge. She also informed me fully of the causes and motives leading up to it, and of the — the main power directing it." He paused reflectively. "She did this, not to save your position — I think she was glad to have you lose that if in consequence she, with you, could go to fresh fields, and so leave the sphere of influence she was finding it so hard to loosen — but because she wanted justice done to you and the faithful work you had done. That is what she, a woman, came to tell me, a man and a stranger. It was bizarre, but it was brave."

"Oh!" Alan was recalling. "Yes. I saw her come out of your office that afternoon."

"You did?" smiling. "Strange how things arrange themselves! Did she know that you saw her?"

"I think not."

"Oh! Hm-m. I see." Calthorpe was piecing things together, too. "And you followed her down. That is how it was you saw Renshaw meet her in the lobby."

"Yes. Did she tell you that, too?"

Calthorpe nodded in a matter-of-fact way. "Yes. Yes, I saw her in Denver about three weeks ago, and we had a long talk."

"In Denver?" Alan wondered whether Elsie had set up an establishment there.

"Yes." Calthorpe smoked on contentedly. Then he observed casually — perhaps over-casually, but his listener did not notice that — "She's a good singer, is n't she?"

"Yes," agreed Alan readily enough. "She was developing a very good voice. Did she sing for you, then?"

"Yes. Well, that is — not for me in particular," coolly. "I was in the grill, and she sang for the whole crowd, of course."

"Oh, Lord!" Alan's face was a study in disgust. "Is she doing that?"

Calthorpe looked at him in surprise. "Yes. Why not? She could n't possibly make so good a living in any other way. She's in a quartet. Very nice girls, they are. I met them. Live a strictly quiet, home life off the stage. Names of the personnel of the quartet do not transpire, if that's what you're thinking of. What would you have her do? Go behind a counter?"

"No," almost curtly. He had a man's aversion to discussing his domestic affairs; but in this instance Calthorpe plainly knew more than he himself did. "She does not need to do anything. I sent her money, but the bank notified me that the money lay there."

"Certainly." Calthorpe nodded entire approval. "She did quite right. No self-respecting woman

will take money from a man who does not want her, even if he is her husband."

Alan made a movement of slight impatience. "You don't understand."

"But I do understand, much more than you do," contradicted Calthorpe evenly. "I know that girl has come bravely through an experience that would have put a good many into an asylum."

Alan smiled at the weighty statement. "I don't think Elsie ever took things to heart quite that deeply."

"I know you don't think so," agreed Calthorpe, dryly, "which just shows how little you really know about it."

Alan sat quiet. He would not contradict the man at his side. And he was glad Elsie had so good and influential a partizan.

"How long has Elsie been — been singing?" he asked then.

"Oh, let's see: about eight months, isn't it? She left home about a week after you did. Hasn't been back since," he added casually.

After a moment's silence Calthorpe began to speak again. His eyes rested gravely on the distant fir tops standing in the sunlight.

"You know, Mrs. Leland's story has made me do a lot of thinking. More than ever I realize how little we really know of life. We handle a set of

symbols, and never pause to think of the immensities that stand behind. I shall always wonder when I hear — How often we read of apparently entirely inexplicable suicides! Of people living whole lives in sane and ordinary fashion, perhaps, and then suddenly doing —” His voice trailed off into deep thought.

Alan sat and smoked in some secret surprise. Something had evidently much impressed this eminently logical and practical man.

“We don’t even know what tremendous potentialities lie behind these pin-points of consciousness we call ourselves.” Calthorpe returned to the man beside him with a friendly smile. “Did you know,” he said then, apropos apparently of nothing in his recent words, “that the morning after that little accident affair, when your wife came down to you in the morning-room, to her knowledge she had never seen you in her life before?”

“No, of course I did n’t know it,” promptly, gazing amazed at the speaker. “How could I know it? Memory completely gone, you mean?”

He gazed at Calthorpe, but hardly saw him. He recalled in a moment the scene in the morning-room as mentioned — the wide-eyed woman who listened in silence to his words. And somehow the recalling brought a twinge of pain.

“Well, why did n’t she say so?” he demanded, almost sharply.

"She was afraid."

"Afraid?"

"Yes. There were complications."

And then, seeing that Alan's full attention and curiosity were aroused, Calthorpe told in detail Elsie's story pretty much as she had told it. He told of her visits to Una in the hospital; of her first meeting with Addie; with Renshaw. He was careful not to omit the little human touches, such as the ruse by which Elsie had obtained Addie's name and her tussles with Annie. He told of her going to New York and touched lightly on the fact that she had not seen any one from her home town since leaving it. Then he gave Alan a short technical explanation of the whole thing, much as he had given Elsie, but perhaps a little more complete and extended.

"The wonder is that she did n't really go insane," he commented as he finished. "She won out entirely unaided and alone. She had n't a real friend in the world."

"Well, but she could have had, if she had only explained," said Alan. He was plainly amazed at what he had just heard; troubled, too, it seemed.

"Oh, I don't know," thoughtfully. "Put yourself in her place. To begin with, do you think you would have ventured to confide in a man who was not only an apparent stranger to you, but who, by his very first words, was plainly inimical? Don't you think all the way through you stood so strongly on

your supposed superior goodness and magnanimity that it was impossible for her to approach and speak? And to whom else could she have safely gone?"

Alan did not reply. He was thinking again of her timid little request to accompany him west. Justified as he had fully thought he was, somehow her face, with its passion and hurt and pain, had often risen up before him during these lonely after days, and always had left him strangely uncomfortable.

"The minute I looked up and saw her standing on that stage," went on Calthorpe, "I knew she had won." His head went up in unconscious imitation of Elsie's attitude. "I knew when she came to me that afternoon in the office at home that she was making a brave stand on something, and I often wondered how she fared. So in Denver I made her tell me everything. I could see, too, that she needed to unburden. She was freezing slowly from the heart outward. She has been a very brave woman. I admire her immensely."

He said these words very quietly. But from him they meant a lot.

Alan sat and thought a few minutes, puffing furiously at his pipe, and staring absently at the clouds of smoke that emanated from his endeavors. He was very much troubled. A sense of shortcoming, almost of remorse, was upon him. And yet he could not see —

"Well," he observed then, as much to himself as to Calthorpe; "I don't see how I could have been expected to know, to understand —"

"You could n't, dear lad," agreed Calthorpe with a smile, kindly but quizzical. "You're far too straight a man to have any understanding, any human understanding. Elsie Leland is a woman of very complex emotional personality. I don't suppose she ever has been understood. How was she brought up?"

"Oh, her mother is Mrs. Van Duyn. Don't you remember C. S. Van Duyn, president of the Independent Power Company?" Calthorpe nodded. "Died about ten years ago. Mrs. Van Duyn is fairly well off. Spends most of her time abroad now. Oh, no, Elsie never had any home life, or anything of that sort. I knew that of course when she married me, and tried to make every allowance."

Calthorpe smiled; but Alan did not appear to notice the slight sign of incredulity. He had gone back in spirit to those first glad months of their married life together. How dear and sweet his Rose Girl had been!

"The first year of our married life was very happy," he said with a half-sigh.

"She stayed closely home and was content with you alone?" guessed Calthorpe keenly.

Alan nodded. "Yes. She seemed quite content. Well, I think she was content. And I still think all

would have been well if — if the child had —”

“Oh! there was a child.” Calthorpe was plainly surprised. “Did it die?”

“Yes. Well, that is — not exactly.” Frowning. “There was a premature explosion up the line, and some fool telephoned in that we were all killed. One or two fellows were knocked out, but no one was killed.”

“And was — That made her ill?”

“Yes. She was very ill. And the child was lost.”

“Ah.” Calthorpe looked much as a miner might who has quite suddenly struck a pay streak. “And did you notice any change in her after that illness?”

“No.” Alan looked questioningly at him. “After the loss of the child there was no necessity for retirement, whole or partial, of course. She gradually began to return to her old life of pleasure and excitement-seeking. And —”

“Of course it was gradual. She wouldn’t be likely to change overnight,” said Calthorpe, amused. “Did n’t you know that that kind of illness constitutes a great shock to the nervous system of a woman? And did n’t it ever occur to you that the shock and illness had anything to do with this craving for pleasure and excitement?”

“No,” thoughtfully. “She seemed quite well. Just how do you mean? You ’ll have to be more explicit. I ’m no physician,” smiling ruefully.

"No, neither am I. But I have a little common sense. I know that when men recover from illness, and their nerves are unstrung, they often fly to stimulants — drugs or drink. Women don't so often do that. They fly to excitement, which is a stimulant of a kind, of course."

"And you think —" began Alan.

"I think if you had had a little patience and understanding, and if you had realized the sick, nervous state of this girl, all would have been well," asserted Calthorpe with decision. "If you had gone out with her instead of insisting on her staying at home and repressing, constantly repressing; if you had done anything to divert her mind for a while, time and affection would have healed her. Instead of that you were away a good deal, I suppose —"

Alan nodded. "Yes. We began the tunnel about that time."

"Yes. And when you were home you began to be impatient and estranged. Then Renshaw came along, and gave her the sympathy and apparent understanding which she needed, and which you ought to have given her. Oh, it's very ordinary. Many thousands of lives have come to wreck in just that way."

Alan looked impressed. He was impressed, very deeply. And tortured, too, by many emotions that for long months had been allowed no place in his well-controlled mind — hope and regret, and desire

for the woman he had loved, desire that he had buried deeply away but which he found still very much alive.

"If she had gone to a psycho-analyst, or a neurologist, or to any one acquainted with the signs of sick psychology, she could have been spared a deal of misery," went on Calthorpe, thoughtfully. "But I don't know that it would have been as well in the long run. As it is, she has been her own psycho-analyst. The slight split in personality that her illness produced, the accident and the experiences she has since passed through have been welded together. By the sternest kind of discipline this girl has cured herself."

Alan nodded. He was thinking again of the marvelous change that had taken place in Elsie — a change that he had acknowledged and credited, but credited with an entirely false basis.

"I should n't have thought it possible," he said then, "that a slight accident could so entirely metamorphose a person — make an entirely different person from the original, as it were."

"It could n't, of course. It did n't," answered Calthorpe, calmly. "The severe daily experience she went through only brought out what was latent and potential in Elsie. In ordinary circumstances it would probably have taken half a lifetime to develop as much — longer than that, maybe. But it only brought out what was already there. It

could n't bring out what was n't there — on the principle that you can't get out of a thing what is n't in it."

"No," Alan agreed. "It must have been in her, of course." He clasped his hands round his knees and looked thoughtfully before him. "Knowing what you have just told me, I can look back and see that she really was wonderful." He turned to Calthorpe with a candid smile. "Many times I found myself marveling at her even then, and yet of course I attributed the change to just the warning — the shock. I wish I had only known," regretfully. Then he frowned suddenly. "That fellow Renshaw needs a good thrashing and I'd like to give it to him."

"Oh, I don't know," said Calthorpe. "He wanted Elsie. You made it very plain that you did n't. He seems to have been straight enough about it. He wanted her to divorce you and marry him. Sometimes that's the best way out of a hopeless muddle. How could you expect him to know that in this case it was n't? Better forget him. You yourself were the one most nearly instrumental in handing her over to him."

Alan turned to him with one of his rarely pleasant smiles. "All right," he said. "I'll take all the blame. Don't imagine for a moment that I'm letting myself off scot-free. I'm not. I know I was a short-sighted, self-opinionated idiot, and deserved

all I got. But—it won't matter so much if—"

He paused again thoughtfully, anxiously. And Calthorpe said nothing to lighten the self-condemnatory verdict. Liking both equally, with these two whose affairs he was trying to smooth Calthorpe was quite impersonal. He knew that Alan had loved his wife, that he still did. He knew, too, that from a man of Alan's make-up no other course could have been expected than the one he had taken. From their different standpoints both Alan and Elsie were justified. Yet he was anxious to press home now the lesson the present outcome might have for a too rigid point of view.

CHAPTER XXX

"**Y**OU say Elsie is in Denver?" asked Alan then, after a few moments' deep thought.

"She was at that time. Not now."

"Well, do you know where she is?"

"I have an idea. Why?"

"Why? Why, because I'm going to her," calmly.

"She has n't forgotten," observed Calthorpe pointedly, "your outright refusal to allow her to accompany you when you started for this place. I talked to her quite a while trying to eradicate that bitter feeling. You see, she happened to know that her motive was right and good, and that you had no proper reason for refusing to have her with you. What shall you say?"

The keen, clear eyes of the man were gentle and reminiscent. "I will confess my blundering stupidity. She will forgive me," he said.

Then he thought over Calthorpe's words. Though here to his face Calthorpe might be somewhat condemnatory and reproachful, away from him he had evidently pleaded his cause with Elsie. Alan had always felt for Calthorpe the strong liking and admiration that one square man feels for another; but now, as he thought of all this man — busy man

of big affairs as he was — had done, of the time, trouble, and interest he had expended, he was lifted for the moment out of his usual reserved self.

"Mr. Calthorpe," turning to him with a grave smile, "I'm not going to thank you, in words, for what you are doing for me and Elsie. It would be foolish to try to. We shall thank you all our lives. But for you it is extremely improbable that we should ever have come together again. We should have gone on misunderstanding, and leading lonely, unfinished, dissatisfied lives. When I think of the trouble and valuable time you have spent on us, I'm — well, I just feel humble. I can't even begin —"

"Well, then, don't," advised Calthorpe, lightly, but laying an exceedingly friendly hand on his shoulder. "Because instead of needing thanks I feel highly privileged. If you can make that girl happy, and be happy yourself, from now on, I'm more than rewarded for the little trouble I have taken."

"I can make her happy. I know I can," confidently. "You see, both her past and future will be in my hands. Of the past I shall resurrect only the sweetest things out of those times we had together at first. If I can only get her back, restore her to what she was in those days! Did you ever see her when we were first married? She was the most radiant, joyous thing you could dream of."

"She is very quiet and grave now," said Calthorpe.

"I know. That is one of the things — one of the changes — that surprised me most. She grew so quiet and — oh, weighty in manner. Even her looks changed," thoughtfully. "Changed without changing, if you can understand what I mean?"

"I think I can," smiling. "Of course, you can never expect a return of that thoughtless girlhood. She has been through too much. Her happiness will always hold a greater understanding. It can be happiness, none the less. And how about you?" he inquired suddenly and quizzically.

"Me? You mean, my happiness? Oh," he smiled almost boyishly, "if you had just gone on living — just gone on is the right word — with a great loss, a want, tucked away deep and trampled on and ignored, and some one had suddenly handed you — well, all you wanted — don't you think you'd feel reasonably secure about your happiness? That's the way I'm feeling."

Calthorpe nodded, with a sort of oddly contented smile. Then he looked at his watch, and rose.

"I've got to catch the night train south. No question about that. Come on down to camp with me, Alan."

"Yes, I'm coming." Alan got up at once. "Can you wait a moment while I speak to the foreman?"

"Of course. Go ahead. I'll climb aboard."

He did so, and sat down in a leisurely way. In about five minutes Alan swung aboard. He smiled at the driver of the jitney — the grave, pleasant smile that the men liked.

"All right, Steve."

As soon as he was seated beside him, Calthorpe had a question ready for Alan.

"There's just one thing I'm not clear about in this case, Alan. I think you can elucidate. That is Miss Hamby's part in it. What on earth made her act as she did?"

"Oh!" Alan smiled. "That was odd, wasn't it? I mean, the way the different purposes — hers and Elsie's — dovetailed in. Of course neither one understood what the other was really driving at. You know, Miss Hamby used to be Renshaw's secretary —"

"Yes. I know that," Calthorpe nodded. "I guessed that was at the bottom of it."

"Yes. It seems —" He paused. "Of course I don't know just how right she was in her conjectures — Renshaw may merely have been having one of his affairs — anyway, she seemed very much in love with him, and intimated that there had been an understanding between them. When Elsie came on the scene, this — this understanding died away, I suppose." He frowned slightly. "At all events, she learned in the office of Renshaw's plan to get me out

of the way, and came and told me of it. She was so afraid I would leave Elsie behind when I went forth in search of fortune, and so play into Renshaw's hand, she even came to the house to try to —"

"Humph! How discreet!" commented Calthorpe in almost a sarcastic manner.

"Well, of course, to me she did not presume to place the blame on any one but Renshaw. And then she was very much worked up and upset — hardly herself at all," said Alan, in an evident effort to be as charitable as possible. "I tried to talk her into a calmer frame of mind. I don't know —"

"I guess you succeeded," coolly. "She's going to marry your successor."

"Oh!" Alan was plainly taken aback. "Well —"

"You don't know whether to congratulate him or not?" queried Calthorpe, an amused twinkle in his eye. "Oh, well," he went on more indulgently, "happiness makes all the difference in the world to one's disposition. And I suppose she did have pretty tough luck for a time."

"I suppose so," agreed Alan, easily.

They were nearing the camp and Alan hastily recollected that as yet he did not know of Elsie's whereabouts. He turned questioningly to the man beside him, and anticipating the demand about to be made of him, Calthorpe parried it.

"Can't you ride on down to Berkhold's with me?"

Does this jitney business come back up to camp to-night?"

"No. But I can see that it does," agreed Alan readily. "Yes, I'll ride down with you. Can't you stay and have supper, though? The S. P. does n't pass through Berkhold's till late. Of course it's only a mess-house supper, but —"

"That would be all right. I'd enjoy it," quickly, "but I think I'll be getting back down. Go and get a coat, Alan. It will be night before you get back."

Alan laughed and shrugged his corduroy-clad shoulders. "Oh, I never wear a coat."

"I might want to borrow it myself before train time," opined Calthorpe, casually.

"Oh! All right." Alan jumped up instantly. "I'll go and get it. That's my shack up there. Will you come up?"

"No, I'll just stay here, I think," smiling comfortably.

"All right. I'll be back in five minutes."

He went up the hillside with easy, swinging gait, threw open the door of the little building, entered, and took about two steps across the floor.

Elsie stood facing him. She had taken off her hat and it lay on the table beside her. She stood in a quiet, waiting attitude. Her head was thrown slightly back, her lips parted; but she looked neither defiant nor pleading. Only waiting, with a certain brave dignity.

Alan gasped with surprise as he came to a halt before her. He looked into her eyes, and she into his, for one long second, and then her eyes fell. He held out his arms with half-murmured words of relief and delight.

"Why, Elsie! Elsie!"

Elsie buried her face against the soft wool corduroy of his coat, and felt the tight clasp of his arms about her, and the pressure of his body against hers. Hot tears came to her eyes — tears of relief from long and well-nigh intolerable longing and suspense and strain.

Alan discovered the tears as he lifted her face to kiss her. "What! tears?" he exclaimed.

Elsie brushed them away hastily. "They came just because I'm so — so glad and happy, I suppose. I don't cry over things any more. Have n't cried since — oh, not since the day you went away."

Alan took the handkerchief out of her coat pocket, and, with his fingers under her chin, wiped away the traces of tears. Then he kissed her eyelids softly.

"I was a brute, was n't I? Did you cry much?"

"Oh, oceans," said Elsie truthfully, and with a little sigh of painful memory.

The faint, pleased smile deepened on Calthorpe's lips as the moments passed. Several members of the camp, bound for Berkhold's, climbed aboard the jitney. Steve, the driver, began to fidget.

"Is n't Mr. Leland going down to Berkhold's?" he inquired of Calthorpe at last.

"I'm not sure whether he is or not," easily. "Suppose you try that tuneful horn of yours."

Steve did, and echoes awoke from the protesting hillside. Two figures rushed to the door of the cabin, and Calthorpe leaned out of the jitney window, and waved merrily.

"No, he is n't coming," he told the puzzled driver. "Full speed ahead, Steve."

Steve lost no time obeying, and the auto-bus moved off.

The contented smile stayed on Calthorpe's face as he rode down to Berkhold's, and in his eyes was a serene, almost reverent look. Sunshine and spring was on the tree-tops and on the hillsides, and in the hearts of the man and woman he had just left. And Calthorpe found it all very good.



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